

Using mobile healthcare facilities for day surgery

Vanguard Healthcare Solutions

In an age that has become increasingly defined by the need for smart use of budgets, healthcare organisations have been striving to find innovative and effective ways in which to treat their patients. In its simplest form, the challenge is to deploy services quickly and efficiently, without sacrificing compliance, standards and patient experience – in other words, to offer high-standard health services without the need for significant capital expenditure.



Mobile healthcare facilities have been instrumental in achieving this flexibility for many healthcare organisations, none more so than for Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust – the public health organisation for Gloucestershire, UK. Over the past four years, mobile units have allowed Gloucestershire Trust to respond to an array of challenges and situations and provided a flexible, cost-effective day surgery service to support and supplement the Trust's own hospitals.

What is a mobile surgical unit?

Mobile healthcare facilities are designed to provide healthcare organisations with a suitable clinical environment in which to carry out surgical procedures, but in a temporary and fully mobile facility. Previously unheard of in much of continental Europe, mobile surgical units have now been made widely available across the EU through a new international service launched by Vanguard Healthcare Solutions – a British company that designs and operates the world's largest fleet of mobile healthcare units. The mobile units designed and operated by Vanguard offer a completely self-contained surgical facility that can be deployed, if necessary, in many different locations in a short period of time.

They can be deployed for a variety of reasons, but predominantly mobile units are used in response to one of three situations: to boost capacity in order

to meet rising demand and generate income; to provide alternative facilities while a permanent unit is being refurbished; or to respond to an emergency by providing a quick boost to surgical capacity. In Gloucestershire, mobile units have helped the county's NHS Trust respond to each of these key scenarios and have become, as a result, a core element of service delivery across the region.

Responding to emergencies: Beating the floods of 2007

When torrential flooding ground the county to a halt in the summer of 2007, hundreds of patients' day surgery procedures had to be cancelled, with the hospital in the town of Tewkesbury virtually inaccessible and power, water and roads all seriously disrupted.

With 8,000 outpatient procedures and 1,200 inpatient operations facing cancellation, the Trust worked with Vanguard Healthcare to deploy a mobile day surgery centre in the grounds of a private hospital in the nearby town of Cheltenham. Working in partnership with Vanguard's nurses and operating department practitioners, the Trust's clinical teams were able to use the mobile unit to treat 700 non-urgent day surgery patients.

Yvonne Pirso, Associate Director of Communications from Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation

Trust, said: “We were desperately in need of extra capacity so it was with huge relief that we were able to call on Vanguard’s mobile day surgery unit.

“Positive feedback from the patients treated was widespread and praiseworthy,” added Yvonne. “Many commented on how bright, clean and efficient the facilities were, while our own clinical teams were impressed by how well equipped it was.”

Protecting capacity at Gloucestershire’s hospitals

When Stroud General Hospital underwent a £1.8m refurbishment of its operating theatres and endoscopy units in 2008, it initially seemed that patients would need to be diverted to Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trusts’ main hospitals in either Cheltenham or Gloucester. Wishing to ensure that treatment could still be delivered locally, the Trust turned again to Vanguard to ensure that patients could still be treated as close to their homes as possible.

The sheer incline of the approach to Stroud General Hospital meant that the hospital grounds themselves were not a viable location, so Vanguard secured an alternative site in the spacious car park of Focus DIY – a superstore close to the Stroud town centre. With the unit deployed in an even more convenient location for patients in the area, the Trust was able to maintain its surgical capacity while the refurbishment was completed but avoided the disruptive, costly and time-consuming transfer of patients to hospitals in Cheltenham or Gloucester.

When the Stroud refurbishment was completed in the following year, the Trust wanted to boost the capacity of the day surgery services at its flagship hospital – Gloucestershire Royal Hospital in Gloucester – using

a temporary solution. Once again, a Vanguard unit provided the means by which the Trust could bolster the capacity at the hospital and treat far more patients that would otherwise have been possible.

Steve Peak, former Director of Service Delivery of Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, said: “This kind of partnership has proved invaluable for our patients. We had good reports from patients who have been very impressed with both the environment and the service provided in the mobile units.”

The benefits of flexible day surgery

The rapid and significant development of mobile surgical technologies has meant that healthcare providers are no longer limited to acute settings when it comes to day surgery procedures and, as with Gloucestershire Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, healthcare organisations are able to use mobile facilities to implement a flexible framework for service delivery.

Vanguard’s CEO Ian Gillespie concluded: “Whatever the situation, organisations need to be prepared to meet the challenges of the modern era head on. Whether it is responding to an unexpected emergency, bolstering capacity while a refurbishment is carried out or simply meeting increased demand, services can be deployed where they are needed, and where they can provide maximum benefit to both Trust and patient.”