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Specialist Estates Services Notification **SESN 15/06**

17th July 2015

For action by:

Board Level Directors (Fire) NHS Health boards and Trusts

For information only:

Chief Executives
Estates/Facilities Directors and Managers
Fire Safety Managers
Fire Advisors

Copy to: Head of Capital Estates and Facilities,
Department of Health and Social Care, Welsh Government

Enclosures:

None

Dear Colleague

FIRE INCIDENT – PRINCESS OF WALES HOSPITAL, BRIDGEND

The purpose of this notification is to share information and highlight points for consideration following a serious fire incident that occurred recently in a mental health facility, at the Princess of Wales Hospital, Bridgend.

Fire Incident Details

At approximately 18:10 hours on the 13th June 2015, a fire occurred in a single bedroom on Ward 14 (ground floor) of Coity Clinic, Princess of Wales Hospital, Bridgend. The fire was caused by a patient who, in possession of a cigarette lighter, set fire to materials (clothing/paper towels etc) placed on his bed. The fire

developed to involve the whole of the room of origin and caused extensive smoke damage to the surrounding accommodation as illustrated below.



Figure 1 Room of origin

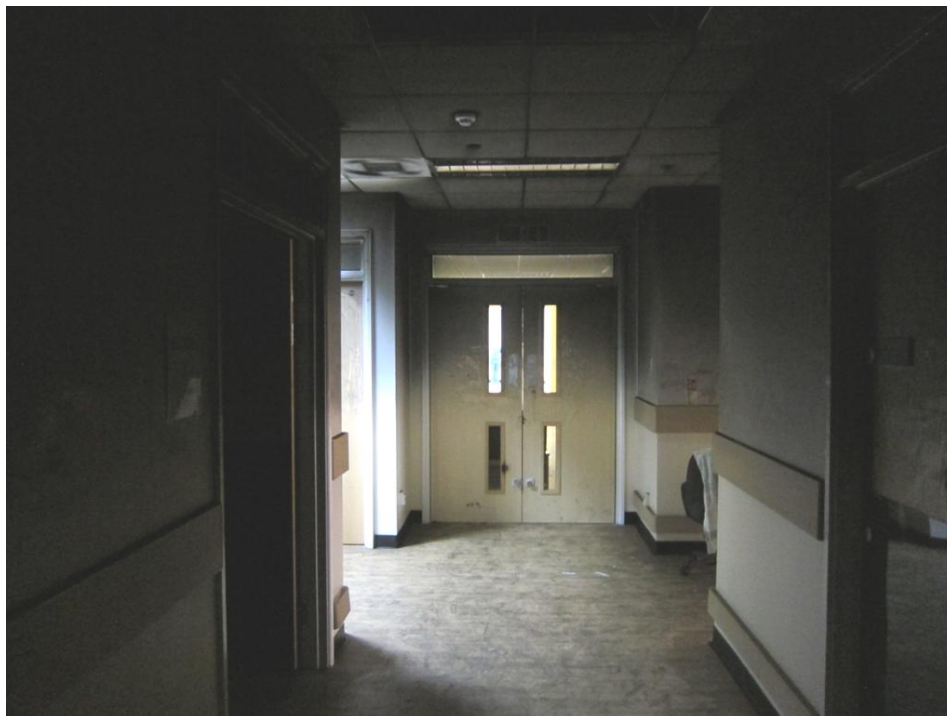


Figure 2 Smoke spread to ward corridor

The smoke detector in the bedroom activated the fire alarm and detection system, alerting staff to the exact location of the fire. On arrival at the room, they found smoke issuing from the door whilst the patient was still in the room. A staff member pushed the door open further and the patient walked from the room. The staff member then left the scene to get a fire extinguisher. On returning, it was considered that the fire had grown too large to tackle with a single extinguisher and the staff then concentrated on the evacuation of the remaining patients which was carried out successfully and in a very timely manner.

The fire subsequently grew to fully involve the patient's bedroom and smoke spread throughout the corridors up to the point where it was contained by cross-corridor fire doors. A degree of smoke spread was also evident to several first floor rooms.

In total approximately 38 patients were evacuated from the ground and first floor.

The fire was extinguished by the Fire and Rescue Service, wearing breathing apparatus, using a hose reel.

Building Description

Coity Clinic is a two storey extension located at the south end of the Princess of Wales Hospital. Built in the early 1990s, the extension is of traditional brick / block construction with lightweight internal partitions in some locations. The extension was designed in accordance with HTM81.

Points for consideration

The following points have been highlighted as a result of this particular fire:

- **Control of ignition sources** This fire was caused by a patient in the mental health sector who was in possession of smoking materials which were used to start the fire.
The lack of control of ignition sources, in particular lighters and matches, has been attributed to a significant number of fire incidents in the mental health sector. Statistics published in the 2014 NWSSP Specialist Estates Services 'Fire Statistics Report' identified that of the 11 deliberate fires that occurred across the NHS Estate in Wales, 9 were started by patients in the mental health sector. This trend is continuing in 2015.
- **Door closing devices** Subsequent to the staff member opening the door to the patient's bedroom, the door was not closed. By the time that staff member returned to the scene with an extinguisher they deemed the fire had grown to such an extent that it was not possible to even approach the room to close the door. As a consequence the effects of the fire spread unhindered to affect the remainder of the immediate area.
At the time of construction, there was no requirement to fit self-closing devices to bedroom doors within the mental health sector. However, this exemption

was removed in Firecode WHTM05 - 02 'Fire safety in the design of healthcare premises' published in June 2014. This now recommends that free swing closers are utilised. If this door had been fitted with a self-closing device, the extent of smoke damage to the adjacent areas could have been significantly reduced.

- **Compartmentation and ventilation** During the post fire investigation, anomalies were evident regarding the integrity of compartmentation and fire damper installation. These anomalies appear to be attributed to a combination of original construction standards and more recent internal alterations which breach the compartmentation arrangements. It is believed some of these issues contributed to the smoke spread to the first floor. However, the breaches in compartmentation could have had a much great significance if the fire had spread beyond the room of origin. The integrity of fire walls is considered an essential aspect of healthcare fire strategies reliant on progressive horizontal evacuation.

Recommendations

In the light of this incident, the following recommendations are made to reduce the risk of similar incidents occurring and to mitigate the effects of any future fire:

- 1 Health boards and Trusts should review their fire management systems with regard to the management of smoking and arson policies and ensure greater control of ignition sources, particularly within the mental health sector.
- 2 Health boards and Trusts should ensure that fire risk assessments are 'suitable and sufficient' and kept up to date.
- 3 Health boards and Trusts should ensure that fire risk assessments consider the necessity for retrospective installation of free swing self-closing devices to bedroom doors within the mental health sector, and prioritise any remedial works accordingly.
- 4 Health boards and Trusts should ensure that fire risk assessments address the integrity of fire walls and the interface with mechanical ventilation, including above ceiling inspections where necessary.
- 5 Health boards and Trusts should review their arrangements for the control of building alterations, ensuring that any works do not compromise fire safety precautions.

Any enquiries on the content of this letter should be addressed to Gareth Lloyd, Fire Safety Advisor on 02920 904119 or e-mail gareth.lloyd6@wales.nhs.uk.



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Yours sincerely

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