

28 June 2019

Health Ombudsman releases report into the safety and quality of maternity services provided by the Emerald Hospital maternity service

Queensland's Health Ombudsman has today released a report into the safety and quality of maternity services provided at five facilities within the Central Queensland Hospital and Health Service (CQHHS) catchment, including the Emerald Hospital maternity service, which is a Level 3 24-hour maternity service and provides services to women from a range of remote locations.

CQHHS conducted an independent review in February 2017 and made 32 recommendations across 8 key areas for improvement which included culture and leadership, community engagement, safety and quality governance, and incident management. The Office of the Health Ombudsman (the office) conducted a systemic investigation that examined the issues identified through this review, analysis of the investigative materials, and during the office's stakeholder visit to the maternity service in January 2019.

The investigation's main findings focused on the safety and quality governance structure of the Emerald maternity service, staffing stability and culture, models of care and consumer engagement. As a result, Mr Brown said while he did not consider that the maternity service required any broad recommendations, he had made one technical recommendation in relation to the epidural service to support the maternity service in its continuous improvement journey.

The investigation found that the Emerald Hospital maternity service's clinical governance framework requires development to improve its approach to safety and quality oversight. This was due in part to instability in executive leadership and resourcing issues. Since 2018, there has been an increased focus on clinical governance and stability in the executive leadership which has led to implemented improvements. Health Ombudsman Andrew Brown says the investigation revealed that there remain challenges in maintaining the required elements of a contemporary approach to clinical governance.

"It is clear that the Emerald Hospital maternity service has overhauled its operation and made significant improvements in a short period of time," said Mr Brown. "What has also been evident is the passion the staff have for providing safe and high quality care."

The investigation also found that the maternity service had experienced challenges in maintaining and recruiting skilled midwifery staff and that there were historical problems in the relationships between midwives and medical staff. Furthermore, it became apparent that there had previously existed disconnection between the women and the maternity service's care decisions. Finally, there were challenges identified around the governance of the flying obstetric and gynaecologist model of care as that service was provided by an external clinical provider who sat outside the normal line management, escalation and referral pathways within CQHHS. A hub and spoke model of care replaced the FOG service.

Mr Brown said that as a result of the review, improvements to the maternity service had been made in a short period of time. The investigation found that the service had addressed cultural problems with a number of initiatives that have improved relationships between midwives and medical staff, but that

rural recruitment into the maternity service remains a barrier for the service. A focus on consumer partnering and engagement has now led to arguably the best example of consumer engagement across the CQHHS. This engagement was reinforced during a meeting with staff from this office and over 10 mothers who shared their positive birthing experiences at the Emerald Hospital maternity service, demonstrating the significant commitment to improvement and achievement by the service. The hub and spoke model of care has reported significantly improved clinical outcomes since its introduction.

“The transformation of the Emerald Hospital maternity service’s relationships with consumers, brave decisions about models of care and a culture that is supporting safe and high quality outcomes demonstrate a service that is committed to continuous improvement,” said Mr Brown. “It will now be important for leadership to maintain its energy and focus on embedding improvements and implementing new processes to address the ongoing challenges of delivering care in a rural maternity service.”

Mr Brown said that he is confident the Emerald Hospital maternity service will continue to build upon its successes in providing a safe and quality maternity service.

The full investigation report is available to download from the OHO website at www.oho.qld.gov.au.

Media enquiries: media@oho.qld.gov.au

—ENDS

