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PRESS RELEASE

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Mental health cuts bring fears of Mid-Staffs-style scandal

Staff in one of London's mental health foundation Trusts are warning that a package of £9 million in spending cuts being brought in by Trust bosses could result in a collapse of care standards on the scale of the recent scandal in Mid Staffordshire Hospitals.

Most worrying are the cuts proposed by East London NHS Foundation Trust, details of which have been leaked to London Health Emergency, include cuts in front-line nursing staff on acute wards, reducing by 2 Whole Time Equivalent staff per ward to save £2m. The changes, which come into force this week, could put the safety of staff and patients alike, and make it next to impossible for the remaining staff to deliver high quality care.

To make matters worse, new rotas would also restrict the crucial "handover period" between shifts to just one hour, jeopardising the necessary exchange of information on patients with complex needs, and would also oblige nurses to cover six shifts instead of five.

Other cuts include £500,000 from the medical budget, £500,000 from Therapy budgets, and cuts ranging from £500,000 to £1 million from each locality directorate. £1.5m is also to be cut from corporate services, although it is less clear how this will impact on patient care. More cuts are to follow next year and the year after, as the Trust seeks total savings of £15-£20 million.

The management proposals to the Joint Staff Committee make clear that all of these cutbacks are cash-driven, stressing that "It has become increasingly apparent that the NHS is going to be expected to make significant savings in coming years to cope with a reduction in income and an accompanying increase in costs ... This will result in a reduction of budgets across all areas".

But East London NHS Foundation Trust bosses have not come clean with the public on the scale and impact of these cuts, and staff fear for their jobs if they speak out publicly. Concerned staff have approached London Health Emergency to help them raise the alarm over the potential damage to patient care.

Commenting on the cutbacks, LHE's Information Director Dr John Lister said:

"These cuts are a shocking indictment of the methods of this secretive Trust, which clearly prefers to risk a major collapse in patient care to save relatively small amounts of money rather than work with their own trade unions to help publicise the resource constraints that are driving them into these panic measures.

"We hear that middle and senior managers are among those who have expressed concern that these cuts could have similarly disastrous effects to the previous ill-judged cuts in night staff by the Trust. These resulted in a series of serious incidents, culminating in the attempted murder of a nurse on night shift: the subsequent press furore forced a reversal of the cuts.

"East London is among the first to translate NHS London's plan for £5 billion of cuts across the capital into actual service cuts, beginning very soon: and it shows that the consequences could be a major collapse in front line services.

“We are calling on the Trust to withdraw these plans immediately, maintain existing services, and join campaigners across London fighting cutbacks, closures and downgrading of services.”

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