

# Hospital board 'committed' to 24/7 emergency care

**Weston General Hospital's board is 'committed' to 24/7 emergency care, despite overnight closures beginning on Tuesday.**

Patients during the temporary closure will be taken to Bristol or Taunton between 10pm-8am, and hospital chiefs cannot predict how long it will last.

The move is on safety grounds as Weston does not have enough A&E doctors.

However, Phil Walmsley, the hospital's director of operations, told North Somerset Council's health panel on June 22: "The board is committed to providing a 24-hour, seven days a week, emergency department."

But whether that is the same type of A&E service is unclear.

North Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group has run an engagement programme over plans which would see paramedics told not to bring

**TOM WRIGHT**

tom.wright@archant.co.uk

patients to Weston's A&E overnight. The process is ongoing.

The hospital though is adamant it wants to fully reopen A&E quickly.

Medical director Peter Collins said the hospital has only three permanent emergency consultants, when it needs seven or eight and hopes the closure will allow A&E to be 'reset'.

He said recruitment is problematic in Weston. Job offers have been rejected and some interview candidates have not attended.

A head-hunter is seeking foreign doctors, as has been done before for nurses.

But Cllr Bob Garner said: "(If I need emergency care) I'd argue until the cows come

home I wouldn't want to go to Weston.

"I don't want a consultant from Uzbekistan because they are the last on the list of who wants to come to the UK."

Dr Collins said the hospital is also focusing on reducing A&E pressure. He said 10-15 per cent of patients wrongly go to A&E and creating primary care opportunities within the hospital, as a GP normally provides, would help.

However, Cllr Mike Bell said the hospital appears to be 'going round in circles' with an old walk-in GP centre scrapped in 2012.

The short-term A&E closure means an estimated 27 patients will need to go elsewhere.

University Hospitals Bristol deputy chief executive Mark Smith, said: "There will only be an additional five or six ambulances per night - given the number we normally have, that's a small number."