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Manchester's Nightingale hospital reopens to non-covid patients

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The Nightingale hospital in Manchester is open and ready to admit patients from across the north west of England. But, in a surprising twist, it is only admitting patients who do not have covid-19.

The facility, based at the Manchester Central Convention Complex (formerly known as G-MEX), is the first of the Nightingale hospitals to reopen to help take pressure off local hospitals. Sunderland and Harrogate are expected to be next, and all the others are on standby.

A spokesperson for the NHS in the north west confirmed that the NHS Nightingale Hospital North West was open, expecting its first patients imminently, and would “provide care for those who do not have covid-19 but do need further support before they are able to go home, such as therapy and social care assessments.”

The facility has 750 beds, but unlike the first Nightingale hospital, which opened in London, it was never designed to take patients with covid-19 requiring critical care. During the first wave, all patients in the north west who needed to be on a ventilator were treated in existing hospitals. Although Manchester admitted the most patients with covid-19 of all the Nightingales, at around 100, it did not offer respiratory support beyond continuous positive airway pressure.

This time, NHS Nightingale Hospital North West will act as a step-down facility for patients without covid-19 discharged from general and surgical wards to free up beds. It will house patients awaiting social care assessments and provide support and rehabilitation services to free up beds in acute hospitals. In the summer, day room facilities at the Nightingale were expanded, and a kitchen for use in the rehabilitation and enablement of patients has been installed.

The first patients are expected to arrive from Manchester University NHS Foundation Trust, but the hospital will provide step-down care for the whole of the north west region. Rob Barnett, chair of Liverpool local medical committee, branded that a “hare brained idea.” He said, “This might be fine for people who live in Manchester and the surrounding area, but it really doesn't make sense for Liverpool residents to be trekking out there.”

The transfer of patients who are fit for discharge from hospital into the community is a persistent problem that needs to be resolved more locally, he said. Many such patients in Liverpool are from deprived areas, so their family and friends might not have the means to visit if they were sent to another city. “It beggars belief that anyone thought it was a sensible idea,” Barnett said.

As in the first wave, staff will be drafted in from a variety of places to work at NHS Nightingale Hospital North West. Some will be deployed from other NHS services, and NHS Professionals is also advertising for roles. As well as medical, nursing, and pharmacy vacancies, a range of allied health professional roles to support patient rehabilitation are needed, including physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, and dietitians, the advertisement says, and all applicants need to commit for a minimum of four weeks.¹

1 NHS Professionals. Nightingale jobs. <https://www.nhsprofessionals.nhs.uk/en/Nightingale/Nightingale/jobs>