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Epsom Hospital looks to ‘terrible’ Australian flu season

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Epsom and St Helier hospital staff will be encouraged to get their flu jab after a “terrible” Australian flu season which can be a sign of things to come in the UK.

Among concerns that covid is now “old news” staff will also be encouraged to take their coronavirus booster in a campaign to encourage take-up in front-line staff.

A board meeting of the Epsom and St Helier hospital trust on Friday (September 2) heard that Jacqueline Totterdell, group chief executive of the St George’s and Epsom and St Helier hospitals group, had “nearly died” when she was admitted to hospital with flu a couple of years ago.

She said this experience gave her “a real passion” for making sure people took up the jab.

The chief executive added: “We always look towards Australia for what sort of flu season they’ve had, and they’ve had a pretty terrible one.

“That, for me, is a real driver about how we can encourage more of our staff to have the flu jab.”

Non-executive director Peter Kane raised a concern that coronavirus may be “yesterday’s news” and asked about how staff at the trust would be reminded of the importance of the coronavirus booster and the flu vaccination, which can be given at the same time.

Arlene Wellman, group chief nursing officer, said communications would begin going out to staff and that the best practices would be pulled from both St George’s and Epsom and St Helier trusts.

The two trusts formed a hospital group last year with the aim of sharing and working together on services.

According to the NHS, more people are likely to get flu this winter as fewer people will have built up natural immunity to it during the pandemic.

It can be life-threatening for some people, particularly those with certain health conditions.

The chief executive also confirmed the next board meeting in November would be updated on the trusts’ winter resilience programme, which is already being planned, and included looking at having the capacity to vaccinate all staff.

The coronavirus booster will be offered to certain groups including residents and staff in care homes and front line health and social care workers.

The meeting also heard about staff at St Helier “doing their absolute best” in a hospital building that was often not fit for purpose, with leaking roofs and lifts that were not big enough to fit hospital beds.

In July it was announced that a planned new hospital in Sutton has been delayed to 2027 at the earliest.

Board papers: https://www.epsom-sthelier.nhs.uk/board-papers-and-agendas

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