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A&E pressures set to mount

>> 'Closing units means use of existing services will rise by 114 per cent'

By **Poppy Bradbury**
poppybradbury@trinitysouth.co.uk

MORE than twice as many patients could clog up St Mary's A&E if emergency services at surrounding hospitals are stripped, the Labour group claims.

Research by the GLA Intelligence Unit for the London Assembly Labour group shows that if proposals to downgrade Hammersmith and Charing Cross hospitals go ahead, the Paddington hospital would see a 114.4 per cent increase in demand.

Health campaigners across west London have been fighting proposals by NHS North West London to slash services at Ealing, Central Middlesex and the two Hammersmith and Fulham hospitals to help meet £1bn of savings.

An NHS spokesman said the figures do not take into account that hospitals facing department closures would retain 24-hour urgent care centres and that

investment would be made to the 'major hospitals', primary care and ambulance services.

Karen Buck, Labour MP for Westminster North, which includes Paddington, said she is 'very, very aware' of the knock-on effect in the area and called for more investment at St Mary's and community health services to reduce the pressure on its A&E.

"Although St Mary's is not on the list of closures, it's absolutely obvious that pressure will increase massively as a consequence because many of those units are already operating at full capacity," she said.

"Obviously we would expect to see a significant increase in investment in capacity at St Mary's to help cope, but what we also need is to be absolutely confident of additional capacity in community and primary care services, as well as reducing the number of unnecessary A&E attendances.

"There is a massive issue around the quality of out-of-hours GP services. People don't feel confident in them or know where to find them so they go to their A&E.

"We all agree logically it is best to have better GP and primary care services and a smaller, higher quality A&E, which will all save more lives,

but the process of the financial squeeze, NHS reorganisation and threat of privatisation makes it difficult."

Assembly member Murad Qureshi said: "This is extremely

worrying and will have an unprecedented impact on the provision of health care in Westminster."

An NHS spokesman said: "We know that through improvements to

primary and urgent care, we will reduce demand on emergency hospital services.

"These improvements will be made before any changes to A&E take place."

Hanukkah lights up lives

VICE-PRESIDENT of the Hindu Forum of Britain, Madhava Turumella, celebrates Hanukkah in St John's Wood.

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