

## **ULHT are leading the way in frailty education and care**

Lincolnshire hospital staff are leading the way after being among the first in the country to be awarded Master's degrees in frailty.

ULHT Consultant Nurse for Frailty Deborah Birch helped to develop the Master's programme with the University of Lincoln. Three members of staff from Lincoln County Hospital have just graduated from the course and another three are underway with their studies.

Deborah said: "We have got an aging population in Lincolnshire and it is expected to continue in the same direction, so we need this focus and expertise in our hospitals to make sure we can identify patients who are frail and also have the links in place to refer them to our colleagues in the community where needed.

"Caring for frail older people is highly complex and requires skilled, trained staff who reinforce the values and standards of compassionate care. I am really proud that ULHT staff are among the first group in the country to receive their Master's degrees. It will really help our older patients, their families and also all of our healthcare colleagues in and outside of our hospitals."

Among the first team members to get the qualification at ULHT are a ward sister, a matron/discharge lead and also a matron from the theatre team.

In addition to the Master's degree programme, the Trust has also introduced a frailty team to the A&E department at Lincoln County Hospital. The consultant, consultant nurse for frailty and a frailty nurse specialist work alongside colleagues in the department to identify patients who are aged 65 and older and are frail.

The team see if any plans and support can be put in place to help in the patients' recovery and prevent any future visits to hospital. Last year, 19,854 people aged 65 and over visited the department. Future plans would see these teams introduced to other areas of the Trust.

Deborah added: "When frail patients are admitted we can also make sure that we are proactive and can make any necessary plans for their discharge and request any future support they may need from the teams in the community. By doing this early we can potentially reduce the length of their stay in hospital and get them home sooner.

"Research shows that for every 10 days of bed rest in hospital, the equivalent of 10 years of muscle ageing occurs, in people over 80 years old. It takes a lot longer to regain their muscle strength than it does to lose it. Therefore it is important to make sure there are no delays in getting frail patients home once they are ready to be discharged and that's where we can help from the moment they first arrive in A&E.

“I am really passionate about the care we provide for our older and frail patients. I think by having the knowledge and expertise in our hospital as well as the team in A&E is really going to help us provide the best quality, patient-centred care that is available. This is about doing what is the right thing for our patients.”