

# Integrating Sussex Mental Healthline into NHS 111 'smokescreen for closure'



**This vital service is set to change so much it can only be seen as a shut down**

Plans to integrate Sussex Mental Healthline (SMHL) into NHS 111 are nothing but a smokescreen for the closure of the service, says GMB.

Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust continues to mislead staff and service users about the effectiveness of the planned changes.



GMB, the union for NHS workers, is again raising concerns the integration is such a dramatic change the service existing callers currently access will simply cease – and the plans represent nothing short of an outright closure.

The union is alarmed users of the current helpline are not being made aware of the true effects of this service closure.

Staff are effectively gagged from letting callers know that they will need to seek alternative sources of support through other helplines like the Samaritans or Silverline.

The move towards to the 111 service creates a more clinical pathway response when understanding if callers require an urgent or emergency response to their issue.

However many callers might actually just want to hear a reassuring voice or have a conversation which might allow them to make sense of how they are feeling.

Our members feel the results of a clinical pathway questioning approach changes the face of SMHL and will see an increase in callers simply hanging up and not calling again as the intrusive line of inquiry embedded within the 111 system prompts questioning such as ‘Have you attacked anyone or threatened them with violence?’

GMB members have criticised the lack of meaningful consultation with staff. The trust has instead chosen to attempt a fait accompli implementation and sham discussion in order to close the 23-year-old SMHL service and force staff to transfer to NHS 111 without all the rights they are entitled to.

**Gary Palmer, GMB Regional Organiser, said:**

“This is a closure in all ways. Our members are worried the trust is not being corporately transparent about adding more layers, steps or barriers for callers seeking support.

“Meanwhile existing callers are not being made aware of the effect of these changes and GMB feels SMHL staff are being effectively gagged about preparing callers for the shutdown.

“Any concerns raised have been ignored. In fact, workplace stress absence levels have dramatically increased, as staff are put under pressure to adhere to the trust’s line around the closure without question.

“Intimidation and bullying is increasingly used to manage those that still call out the dishonesty of the trust.

“GMB will continue to support members through this uncertain period as resignations and potential claims for constructive dismissals are considered by those staff who feel they cannot adhere to the



misrepresented and dishonest approach from the trust.

“This vital service is set to change so much it can only be seen as a closure to the current delivery as it stands, stripping both staff of their employments rights and leaving callers without support.”

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## Member requiring help?

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