

Hospital gets sensory room

A Norfolk mental health unit has spent £30,000 on providing sensory equipment for its patients. The new facilities at St Luke's Hospital, in Attleborough, include a sensory sound studio with soft flooring and walls, bead pool and mood lights where patients can listen to music and "chill out". There is also a light studio that has fibre optics and a bubble wall, as well as two separate "calming" areas.

The hospital caters for up to 24 adults with learning disabilities aged 18-64. Some have behavioural problems and medical conditions such as clinical depression, and they all require specialist care. Jill Ashford, speech and language therapist at St Luke's, worked with David Payne, product manager for supplier Sensory Plus, to tailor the facilities to meet the patients' needs. She said: "the sound studio has padding so the patient can be comfortable, safe and relaxed. It's proved very successful and the patients are put into place the relaxation techniques they are learning".

"The light studio is dual purpose. It works as a cinema with quadraphonic sound. We can turn off the other lights and you get a cinema feel of sitting in the dark. Patients can come in with a friend and a member of staff. You can also just play gentle music with a stronger light source, and we are going to have a vibrating floor. Usually we use one or two lighting effects in isolation so you don't get overload".

St Luke's is owned by Mild Professional Homes and in November voluntarily closed its 13-bed unit for adolescents at Attleborough, following intervention from the Healthcare Commission. Particular concerns were raised about the lack of procedures in place to ensure staff had the clearance, qualifications and experience to work there. Hospital manager Russell Channer said he could not comment on the issue. He stressed the company was a partner organisation to the National Health Service and provided specialised care not available in the public sector. St Luke's Group took over the former Wayland Hospital premises in the town, and was first registered to treat adults in December 2004. It has agreed to a restriction preventing it from admitting children. Demolition of some of the old wards is taking place and the site is being redeveloped in phases. Mr Channer said: "The idea fundamentally is that we will have between eight to 10 units, with maybe 150 beds across the site".