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UK'S LARGEST ACUTE ADMISSIONS UNIT IS NOW ONE OF THE HIGHEST PERFORMING EMERGENCY CARE SERVICES IN THE COUNTRY

The new Acute Admissions Unit (AAU) at Watford General Hospital, which was built off-site by Portakabin subsidiary, Yorkon for ProCure21 partner Medicinq Osborne, is now among the best performing emergency care services, with one of the lowest re-admission rates in the country.

Constructed as part of a £25m ProCure21 contract awarded to main contractor Medicinq Osborne, the new building comprises 142 steel-framed modules. These were manufactured and substantially fitted out off site by Yorkon in a £12m contract, reducing the programme time by around six months and minimising disruption to patient care on a very busy hospital site.

The facility, which is linked to the hospital's existing A&E department, is being used to pioneer a new model of care for emergency cases with rapid assessment and consultant-led diagnosis. This approach improves the patient experience and can dramatically reduce the long-term effects of serious conditions such as strokes and heart attacks.

Designed by Murphy Philipps Architects, the AAU provides 120 beds for emergency admissions, two cardiac catheterisation laboratories, diagnostics including x-ray, ultrasound and CT scanning, a new hospital pharmacy with robotic dispensing, and a roof-top plant room.

Commenting on the new building, Graham Ramsay, Medical Director at West Hertfordshire Hospitals NHS Trust, said, "We are delighted with the new facility. This is the largest of a new generation of acute admissions units and forms part of the Department of Health's new 'Model of Care' initiative."

"Early indications are showing that the new model of care provided in the AAU of early assessment, diagnosis and treatment is having a very positive impact and patients have been really enthusiastic about the environment and the service they are receiving."

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Lesley Harrison, Senior Sister in the AAU, added, "Patients and staff are very pleased with the new building. The unit is light and airy – a pleasant environment that is much easier to keep clean. There is lots of space around patient beds which is hugely beneficial when clinical staff are carrying out interventions. Patients love the bright colours and have even compared it to a hotel!"

The off-site approach enabled Yorkon to start manufacturing and fitting out the new AAU before demolition works had been carried out on site. This parallel working reduced the programme by around 50 per cent and allowed the existing hospital site to remain in use for much longer.

The building is finished in wedgewood blue with contrasting white render and grey aluminium cladding for a contemporary appearance. It was craned into position at the rate of ten 14m-long modules per day in less than four weeks for the final stages of fitting out and commissioning.

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Editor's Notes

1. The advantages of off-site construction for healthcare projects include:
 - programme times reduced by up to 50 per cent, allowing earlier completion with a positive impact on patient care
 - reduced disruption to patients, staff and the local community during construction
 - fewer vehicle movements to site
 - safer, quieter and cleaner
 - improved quality and reduced future maintenance

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- a high level of design flexibility internally and externally
 - buildings can be expanded without decanting
 - improved thermal efficiency for lower running costs and reduced carbon emissions
 - greater cost control and reduced material wastage
 - consistent delivery on time and on budget.
2. Off-site construction involves the manufacture of steel-framed modules in a controlled factory environment, using production line technology, whilst the foundation works are completed on site. The modules are delivered to site by road where they are craned into position in just a few days ready for the final stages of fitting out.