



Delays to Patient Discharge Follow-up Visit Report September 2016



Rationale of follow-up visit

Following the work completed by Healthwatch Stockton in 2014 'Arrangements for Discharge' from the University Hospital of North Tees, further work was carried out investigating transport arrangements following patient discharge in February 2016.

A follow up visit was arranged and conducted on 6th September 2016 by Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees and welcomed by the Trust. The purpose of the follow up visit was to assess what actions had been made following Healthwatch's recommendations to improve patient experience during discharge from the discharge lounge.

The recommendations Healthwatch made included; addressing environmental issues, recommendations to reduce risk and a number of issues impacting on the length of time patients waited to go home once transferred to the discharge lounge.

The Healthwatch team spoke to staff who were working in the discharge lounge and patients, their family, friends or carers. Healthwatch carried out staff and patient interviews to gather feedback. A meeting with the Senior Clinical Professional at University Hospital of North Tees was also held to gather further information about the Trusts planned changes to the discharge process and lounge.

For reference please follow the links and see Executive Summaries:

http://www.healthwatchstocktonontees.co.uk/sites/default/files/final_report_discharge_from_hospital_0.pdf

<http://www.healthwatchstocktonontees.co.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/FinalReportTRUHNT5.pdf>

<http://www.healthwatchstocktonontees.co.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/ResponseTRUHNT.pdf>

Observations

The Healthwatch team noted that a number of the previous recommendations had been introduced to the lounge environment which included the TV being reinstated and additional seating, some of which now is suitable for the elderly and frail. Seating has been rearranged to ensure small tables are within reach of patients with drinking water and cups available to ensure adequate hydration for those using the lounge.

Healthwatch noted that the staff asked those waiting in the lounge if they would like the television on and ensured the jugs of water were filled.

Although leaflets are now available in the rack it was not full and they were limited to information on 'Blood Clots' and 'Your Health and Social Care Records'.

Antibacterial dispensing liquid is now available and visible at the entrance and exits of the discharge lounge. A range of magazines are also available in the lounge and there was a copy of the Daily Express.

Healthwatch observed that although there were a number of patients waiting for medication and letters on the day of the follow up visit, the flow of patients being discharged was consistent. Those waiting had not had the excessive wait in the lounge to go home that Healthwatch had previously observed, which for some patients was between four and six hours.

Healthwatch observed how long patients had waited for their medication and letters throughout the day and found most had waited under two hours.

For a short period of time in the afternoon Healthwatch observed there was only one member of staff working in the lounge. This staff member wasn't able to collect discharge medication due to being on her own.

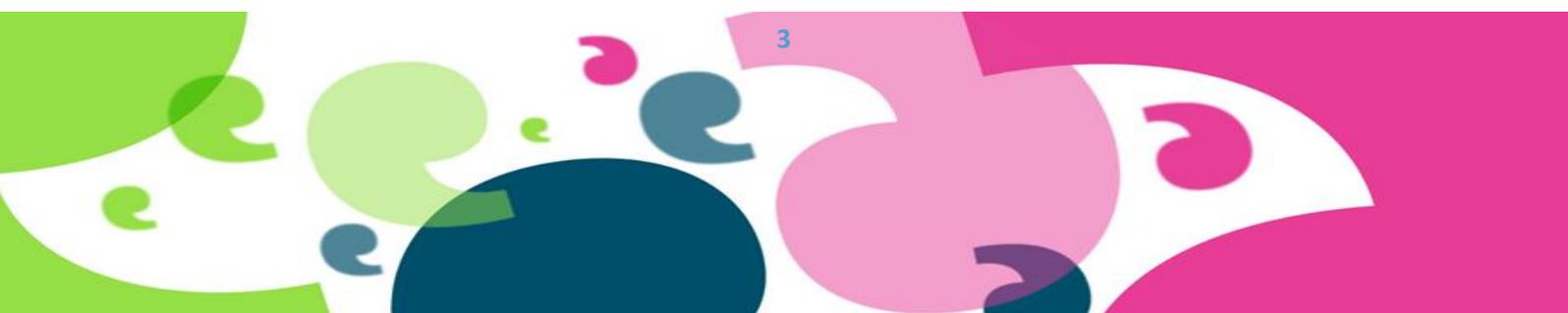
Healthwatch observed that the staff team in the discharge lounge continued to facilitate the timely discharge of patients by 'going the extra mile'. On two occasions during the follow up visit, a staff member offered to deliver the medication and letter to the patient on her way home from work. To enable patients to go home without delay staff members were seen to ring family members to inform them they could return for medication and letters later in the day.

It was evident to Healthwatch that there continues to be staff shortages in the lounge. It was encouraging however, that Healthwatch observed a patient leaving the lounge soon after arriving with a volunteer. The Trust addressed Healthwatch's recommendation to introduce volunteer drivers to deliver medication and letters in their Emergency Care Senior Team meeting in June 2016. Healthwatch were informed that the governance around utilising volunteer drivers for transporting medications remains an issue.

Patient feedback: **Please note quotes from patients are highlighted in pink*

Healthwatch spoke to a number of patients waiting to go home, comments included:

'I like the TV and it's comfy in here' This patient told Healthwatch he had been fully informed of the discharge process and that the consultant told him he could go to the discharge lounge, he also commented **'I've no idea why I'm waiting for a letter'**



Another patient's family member informed Healthwatch they were told on ward 38 it would be quicker to get home if they came to the discharge lounge rather than staying on the ward, the relative felt the patient would have been more comfortable on the ward **'He's just been told he's dying as well'**.

Staff Nurse and Health Care Assistant feedback:

Healthwatch spoke with the staff who were keen to thank Healthwatch for the discharge lounge report and recommendations that were made to improve patient experience. Comments from the discharge lounge staff included **'we are over the moon with the changes'**.

Healthwatch were informed that the Trakcare computer system does not allow access for certain staff members, this could be a barrier for timely discharge of patients. The staff informed Healthwatch they had two training sessions on this relatively new system but there were often issues with it. Staff welcomed the remote access IT support system and gave praise to the unit who had resolved this on more than one occasion.

The staff were also extremely enthusiastic about the planned changes for the discharge lounge, particularly the change of use for one area in the lounge which will be a refreshment area for patients, family and carers to use. This will enable staff to focus on facilitating discharge and one of the team commented to Healthwatch **'there's a fridge on the way too'**.

Staff informed Healthwatch they have asked for fans to cool the discharge lounge. It was particularly hot on the day Healthwatch visited and some patients, family members and carers Healthwatch spoke to commented on how uncomfortable the lounge was in the heat.

Senior Clinical Professionals Feedback

Healthwatch met with the Senior Clinical Professional on the day of the follow up visit who is responsible for the implementation of changes to the discharge lounge and discharge processes.

Healthwatch were informed that a new patient discharge handover document has been devised, this is electronic and not in use yet. It should address some of the issues Healthwatch highlighted and make recommendations concerning those patients with additional needs, such as dementia, specific dietary requirements or allergies. The continued use of the current paper document, continues to pose some risk due to staff relying on verbal communication between ward staff and discharge lounge staff regarding a patient's needs. This is a basic document and it

is the responsibility of the staff to remember to ask the appropriate questions to ensure risks are eliminated when transferring a patient to the discharge lounge.

Healthwatch were informed of plans to utilise a room within the discharge lounge for the discharge liaison team, this will include the relocation of the Patient Flow Manager (PFM). The PFM provides additional support if the discharge lounge staff need to escalate issues of capacity during busy periods. Having the team working in close proximity will provide additional support for the discharge lounge and facilitate a more joined up approach to the work of the teams.

The Senior Clinical Professional explained how volunteers will be recruited for a role to support the staff in the discharge lounge.

Healthwatch welcomed the offer from the Senior Clinical Professional to attend an additional meeting to discuss the action plan which details the changes the Trust intend to make to the discharge processes.

Additional Information

A meeting was held with the Senior Clinical Professional to discuss the action plan for discharges in relation to the discharge lounge. The recent recruitment of a volunteer coordinator at University Hospital of North Tees will see the role out of a programme where the lounge is supported by volunteers to assist patients in such things as accompanying to the toilet and refreshments while they wait to be discharged.

Recruitment of a Band 5 Pharmacy Technician to be based in the discharge lounge 4 days per week is imminent. It was explained to Healthwatch the benefits of doing this is that the technician will have full awareness of the medication processes and procedures for dispensing, quality of checking the medication and the counselling of patients on their medication offering a greater understanding. Once in post the Pharmacy Technician will also help to improve communication with the GP and Community Pharmacy to improve and facilitate accurate dispensing of medication.

The Trust are also recruiting for an additional Healthcare Assistant to work in the discharge lounge.

The Patient Flow Manager, Bed Manager and Discharge Liaison Manager are now located in the same office. This allows the teams to have a more joined up approach with conversation and communication in close proximity aiding smooth and timely discharge process.

The electronic handover document and processes for transferring a patient are being developed with a focus on safety, this is an evolving process.

The hospital have worked with the food bank and local charities to employ a voucher scheme system. This is for patients requiring food or clothes for discharge.

Following the initial investigation, the Trust's response included information regarding the development of a Standard Operation Policy for the discharge

lounge. The Senior Clinical Professional advised Healthwatch that due to the recruitment of the Pharmacy Technician, this would need to be revised.

Conclusion

Healthwatch are pleased to see that the recommendations have been acknowledged and changes are being implemented to help improve patient discharge and processes at University Hospital of North Tees.

Healthwatch also feel that the implementation of the Trust's wider discharge action plan, which aims to improve the discharge process will have positive future benefits to both patients and staff.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Stockton-on-Tees would like to thank the University Hospital of North Tees discharge lounge staff and the Senior Clinical Professional for their support during the follow up visit.

Healthwatch also extend thanks to the patients, family, friends and carers who gave their time to provide information about their experiences in the discharge lounge on the day.

References

http://www.healthwatchstocktonontees.co.uk/sites/default/files/final_report_discharge_from_hospital_0.pdf

<http://www.healthwatchstocktonontees.co.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/FinalReportTRUHNT5.pdf>

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