

Healthwatch Kent Spotlight Series

What happens when the person you care for is discharged from hospital?



March 2022

Nearly 150,000 people in Kent are currently looking after someone right now. People are looking after husbands, wives, children, parents, grandparents, friends and neighbours. Many of them (over 35,000) are caring for someone over 50 hours a week.

What happens when the person they are caring is in hospital and is then discharged? What support is available to them as carers? How do they cope?

We spoke to 10 Carers in depth and listened to their story. All of them had recent stories to tell about what happened when the person they look after was discharged from hospital in Kent.

What were the headlines?

The headlines were

- **Poor communication between hospital and carer**
- **Carers were not involved in the patient's care**
- **Carers struggled to access social care and mobility equipment**
- **Many carers did not receive guidance or information about providing patient with ongoing care at home**
- **Medication was unavailable, not ready at point of discharge or often incorrect**
- **Carers would have liked to have felt acknowledged, included and asked how they were coping**



What are we recommending?

1

All Kent NHS Trusts to host accurate, up to date information on their websites which people who find themselves as carers can access easily and understand what support is available and where to get it. We can write this information for all NHS Trusts to use by April 2022.

2

Hospital discharge areas to have up to date and accurate leaflets & posters with information on carer support services including accessing social care, mobility equipment and emotional support services. We can write and design these in partnership with Carer agencies by May 2022 for Trusts to print.

3

We heard some brilliant examples of best practice. We will ensure we are sharing what is working well across Kent by April 2022 so that everyone can learn and benefit. We ask that Trusts make the time to review the information and let us know by May 2022 what they plan to change in their own organisations as a result.

What did we do with the feedback?

We spent over an hour chatting with each Carer individually, listening to their experience and hearing how they have been coping. Wherever possible we answered their questions and ensured they knew how to get support.

Making sure your voice is heard on a national stage

We have shared all of the feedback with NHS England and NHS Improvement as they are currently working to create a new national Commitment to Carers. This commitment will outline how the NHS should be supporting carers going forwards.

We have also shared the feedback across the Healthwatch network. Six other Healthwatches have also been undertaking the same exercise as us and we wanted to hear if Kent Carers had a similar experience to those elsewhere in the country.

Driving changes in Kent

Change at a national level can take a long time, and we want to see more immediate changes. So we brought together a group of key decision makers in Kent to share the issues we have heard and encourage them to make changes here in Kent.

The hospital care was excellent

We heard almost unanimous praise for the hospital staff

“Staff were approachable, accessible and informative”

“The care was excellent, I was very impressed. Food was good quality, hot & well presented.”

“My husband was so well looked after on Emerald Ward. The food was amazing, lots of choice. Medication and meals were on time”

The importance of Carer organisations and voluntary groups

- Carers organisations provide important support and information. However not all Carers knew about them or had accessed support. Many people don't identify themselves as Carers and so don't seek support from a Carer agency.
- We heard positive feedback about the Kent Enablement Team. For example, they had been helping one carer by pushing for more physio for the patient
- When a Carer already had a relationship with a voluntary group such as a Dementia support group, they often proactively kept in touch with the carer to check how they were. This was extremely valued as it was someone they already knew.
- Only half got any information or support from their GP as the surgery didn't know they were carers.

Poor communication from the hospital

- Most Carers told us that they didn't receive any updates from the hospital unless they called directly
- Most Carers felt frustrated and excluded entirely from the care of their loved one
- Carers were often uncertain which ward their loved one was on
- The majority of Carers were only told that their loved one would be discharged on the day. There was no time to prepare.
- Carers felt “pushed” into a decision to discharge their loved one

“I felt like I was being bullied”

“Every call had to be generated by me to the hospital and I found the lack of information not only very frustrating but also extremely distressing.”

“A bit of reassurance, just someone coming to speak to you to say 'he's had a good night, we feel like he'll be ok to come home', just simple little things that.”

Issues with medication and ongoing care

- Majority of carers were not given any guidance about ongoing care, new medication, exercises or interventions
- Most carers were not provided any contact numbers or leaflets for advice
- Two of the Carers were given incorrect medication during discharge

“I was left with a very broken man... I was suddenly expected to be a medical expert”
“I felt that I was totally abandoned”
“I was just left to get on with it”

Carers struggled to access social care and mobility equipment

- “I believe that long delays in receiving care equipment is hindering my loved one’s recovery”
- Carers told us that care packages weren’t implemented, despite being told they would be
- Four carers were advised that they would receive visits from nurses but no one contacted them
- Carers are repeatedly having to chase for support and equipment causing extreme distress

What did professionals say when we shared these stories?

We brought together 15 people from the NHS and social care who directly work with carers or who could influence changes in the support for carers. We were also very grateful to have one of the Carer organisations, East Kent Carer’s Support, with us to share their knowledge.

Everyone recognised that not all carers get the right support at the right time. Everyone was committed to making it better for people going forwards.

Key comments included:

- There isn’t a ‘one size fits all’ solution. What works for one carer, may not work for another.
- The challenge between supporting a carer and balancing the Government directive to discharge people the same day they are deemed fit to go home. Many carers aren’t ready to have their loved one home so quickly.
- Recognition that communication is key. Hospital staff need to talk with carers right from the beginning to ensure everyone knows what is going on and help to manage expectations.

Where is it working well?

We heard about some great initiatives that are being tested in Kent right now.

These include:

- A new trail is taking place on a ward at East Kent Hospitals which will identify carers much earlier. Ward staff will contact the next of kin on the day the patient is admitted. This conversation ensures that the family know what's going on and can ask questions, but also means that that any caring needs are identified early.
- Darent Valley Hospital have a Carer Champions scheme where volunteers are spending time with patients chatting and keeping them company, but also contacting carers to give updates. They act as a link person between the hospital and the carer.
- MTW have a partnership with AgeUK in Sussex called Take Home & Settle. The scheme is helping patients to get home and ensure they are settled and have everything they need. It is personalised to what the patient and the carer needs and is already helping to avoid readmissions. Age UK will help the family to understand what support is available from other voluntary organisations too. They then contact the patient or carer a few days after discharge to check how they are doing.

We are bringing decision makers back together in two weeks to discuss next steps and how we can work together to improve support for carers following hospital discharge.



If you would like to chat with us about the report you can reach us through the following routes:



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Text us on 07525 861 639. By
texting 'NEED BSL', Healthwatch's
British Sign Language interpreter
will make contact and arrange a
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