



The hospital at home

What community services mean for you



Bringing your hospital to your home

Going to hospital for treatment is a distressing experience for everyone, especially if it involves travelling long distances. But imagine if you could get your treatment in your own village or town, or sometimes without even leaving your front door.

It can be very easy to think that the NHS is made up of doctors and nurses caring for us in GP surgeries and hospitals.

But in this simplistic view, everything takes place inside a building with beds, doctors and nurses in it. But much of the fantastic work done in the NHS is done by an “invisible workforce” - invisible because they do not work in a hospital, they do not have beds. It’s all about the service they provide, rather than the place they provide it in.

In other words, we are talking about community services, which in its simplest form means all healthcare that takes place out of hospital.

Services that have traditionally been provided in hospital buildings, such as emergency treatment, X-Ray, and post-operation recovery, are now available in your own community and sometimes in your own home.

This move involves some very big changes to the way the NHS works and may raise lots of questions and concerns, some of which we hope to address in this booklet. Above all, our aim is to show you just how much of your care can take place out of hospital and how it means a much better service for you.

Q. Why do we need to move services out of hospitals in the first place?

Most patients prefer to be cared for in their own homes if possible, so admitting a patient to hospital when they don't need to be there is not the best option for that patient. But it would also be a poor use of our resources – staff as well as money – so there is less to use for new drugs and new ways of treating people.

Q. What are the benefits for me?

Receiving more of your care in the community helps you to carry on with your “normal” life as much as possible. Ill health can cause a lot of disruption in your life. Community services allow you to spend less time travelling, and more time with your friends and family without the restrictions of visiting hours and hospital car parking.

It also helps staff in hospitals, who can concentrate on looking after the very sick patients who need a high level of care that can only be provided in a hospital.

Q. But if I'm really ill, isn't it much better for me to be in hospital where I've got trained staff around me 24-hours a day?

The reality is that if you are really ill, you will still need to go to hospital and be looked after by hospital staff. For example, if you require major surgery, or if you need to be monitored very closely.

But advances in medicine mean that patients do not stay in hospitals as long as they used to. Once your initial hospital care is over, it is often better for you to go home and recover there.

The NHS is changing to adapt to a fast-changing world and we need to make the most of services that can be provided in the community, so we only go to hospital when we really need to.

Read on for some real-life examples of how hospital services being delivered in the community are making a real difference to patients' lives.



Helping you to cope at home

Getting support from community services sometimes means that you won't need to go to a hospital in the first place. If you have a chronic condition, community staff can help you to keep healthy and manage your condition at home.

Llandrindod Wells Leg Club

Powys Local Health Board have started a "Leg Club" providing treatment, education and ongoing care for people with leg-related problems. The drop-in clinic encourages patients to attend for information and advice, which means that they benefit from earlier diagnosis and can be checked frequently to make sure they are getting the right treatment. Regular encouragement from experts and fellow patients makes it much less likely that the leg problem will re-occur, which means patients are much less likely to need hospital treatment in the future. And they also get a free cup of tea and a biscuit at the same time!

Involving the experts - the patients

The Expert Patient Programme, run by Gwynedd Local Health Board, is a course to help people with chronic conditions to self-manage their condition at home. It teaches people skills such as managing pain relief, developing coping skills and planning for the future.

Courses are run in community settings and are led by trained volunteers who themselves have experience of living with a chronic condition.

People who have taken part in the course have said that they feel less isolated, more confident and proactive about their illness. They are also less reliant on their GPs for minor problems as they're managing their own conditions more effectively.

Emergency services on your doorstep

If you need treatment in an emergency, community staff can come and treat you where you are so that you don't need to go to hospital at all – making treatment and recovery quicker and easier for you.

Mental health rapid response

Mental health teams across Wales are developing a new type of service that gives emergency treatment to people in their own homes. Community teams of mental health specialists – such as nurses, psychiatrists and social workers - help people avoid the need to go to hospital by providing immediate treatment to patients when they are experiencing a crisis, right in their own front rooms.

It means that the team can treat people in an environment the patient is most comfortable in. It causes the least disruption to the patient's life, which helps to speed up their recovery. The team then organise follow-up care to prevent the patient from going through another crisis again. If the patient does need to be admitted to hospital, the staff can help them leave hospital sooner by providing continuing treatment at home.

In Conwy and Denbighshire NHS Trust, the home treatment teams helped to reduce the average length of time patients stayed in hospital from 37 days to 28 days.



Consultant Paramedic – taking emergency services to the patient

Pembrokeshire is one of the first areas in the UK to introduce a new way of providing emergency care out of normal hours.

The paramedic responds to calls to the out-of-hours service and travels to the patient. They can then provide short-term treatment or advice to the patient, and can refer them to other health professionals if needed.

It means that the patient is assessed quickly, without them needing to visit a hospital, unless they need further treatment.

Technology

Technology is bringing different parts of the health service closer together, with telemedicine giving you a direct line through to experts anywhere in the country. In some cases, you can even have your health problem diagnosed without having to make a trip to an outpatient clinic in a hospital. In rural areas, it means that specialist consultant expertise can be made available even in a remote GP surgery.

Specialist care close to home

Patients from Aberystwyth who need complex cancer surgery are sometimes referred to the specialist centre in Swansea. However, most of the care – before and after the surgery itself - is provided locally.

Video and internet links between different hospitals (known as “telemedicine”) mean that patients can have their diagnosis carried out locally. Then the team in Aberystwyth can discuss the case with expert colleagues at the specialist centre in Swansea, and decide the best place for surgery.

It means patients get the best of both worlds – they go to the best possible place for their surgery, but still get most of their care closer to home.



Expert opinion at the click of a button

Technology being used in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan is allowing patients to access expert opinion from their local GP surgery.

A patient goes to their GP with a skin complaint, the GP then takes their history and takes a photo of the problem.

The photo is then e-mailed to specialists at University Hospital Wales, who can make a diagnosis and recommend treatment.

It saves patients from having to go to the hospital and means they get an expert opinion much more quickly.

Hospital services at your local surgery

A new type of medical centre is bringing many different hospital services together under one roof – saving patients multiple journeys to their nearest hospital. Additional services such as X-Ray and physiotherapy, as well as traditional services like your GP, can now be provided in your local community. It cuts down travelling distances for hundreds of patients, who can have many of their health needs address at a “one-stop shop”.



Pembrokeshire and Monmouth leading the way

A health and social care resource centre in Pembrokeshire brings many traditional hospital services under one roof, so that patients can access physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, audiology, podiatry, minor injury and radiology services. There is even a library and hairdresser on site. Social workers based at the centre can help with your social care needs too.

At Monnow Vale Health and Social Care facility in Monmouth, they have the same range of services and are also starting special pharmacist clinics where patients can have appointments to discuss their medication. It prevents medicine problems developing into an issue that could require further medical attention in the future.

Lots of people in Wales have more than one condition, which needs more than one type of service. For them, these new resource centres will save multiple trips to their local hospital or GP surgery.

For example, if an elderly patient who receives social care support suffers a fall at their house, the resource centre can deal with the immediate effects of the fall in the Minor Injuries Unit, as well as organise long-term care with the physiotherapy team and also discuss with the social worker whether the patient now needs any increased social care support. The patient's GP and a pharmacist are also on-site for additional support and advice.

New resource centres are being planned for across Wales, saving hundreds of repeat trips to hospital and helping cut down on the disruption ill health can cause in your life.

Shorter stays

If you do need to stay in hospital, you'll be keen to come home as soon as possible. The good news is that thanks to modern medicine, the average length of time that patients stay in hospital is much shorter than it used to be. Once you are discharged from hospital, specially trained community staff can help you recover at home.

In for a day – not a stay

In Swansea, a new £5.2 million day surgery unit is now carrying out procedures such as cataract removal, orthopaedic keyhole surgery and minor plastic surgery on a day case basis. It means patients don't have to spend three or four days in hospital.

The average time patients spend in the unit is less than three hours. The unit is open 7am to 7pm and deals with around 200 patients per week.

Senior sister Susan Williams says:

“With this purpose-built unit the theatres are right here and patients can just walk in. Many of the procedures can take just 30 minutes. But the difference it makes to patients’ lives is remarkable.”

Surgery closer to home

Powys Local Health Board now provides cataract surgery in both Brecon and Llandrindod Wells – previously patients had to travel to Nevill Hall hospital or even to Hereford.

This is a two-stop service with patients being seen by the consultant ophthalmologist and having a full pre-operative assessment on the same day. They agree a date for surgery, with the follow-up work done by a local optometrist.

It means patients are in for a day, not for a stay, and can have their care much closer to home.



Treatment at home

Even if you need to receive intensive treatment, new ways of delivering healthcare mean you can receive your treatment in your own home. It means you can benefit from the familiarity of your home comforts and the support of your family.

Paediatric outreach

As Cardiff's Children's Hospital for Wales is the specialist paediatric oncology centre for Wales, children and young people sometimes face travelling long distances for their treatment. A team of six paediatric cancer nurses based in Cardiff travel across a wide area in mid, west and south Wales to care for children and young people with cancer in their own homes.

The team delivers chemotherapy and other medication in the children's own home, which means much less travelling and disruption for the children and their families.

The nurses also speak to local teachers to help the children settle back into school life. They also enlist the support of play therapists, physiotherapists and social services to make sure the children benefit from all-round care.



Chemotherapy at home

In Conwy and Denbighshire, cancer patients can be cared for in their own community rather than having to travel to hospital for treatment.

A specialist nurse based at The North Wales Cancer Treatment Centre and in Conwy and Denbighshire Community helps the district nurses to deliver this specialist service to patients in their own home or community clinics. These patients are given a 'chemotherapy pump', which supplies their chemotherapy through a 'central line'. This is a soft flexible thin plastic tube inserted into a vein in the arm or chest wall.

Sister Pat Pilkington from the North Wales Cancer Treatment Centre says:

"It means patients have more time at home with their families, improving their quality of life and easing their cancer journey".

Follow-up care

Lots of patients will still need medical attention after their treatment or their stay in hospital. Follow-up care used to involve several return visits to the hospital's outpatient department, but now this type of care is often carried out in the community by staff who help to make sure you won't need to go back in.

Help at the touch of a button

Swansea patients get extra help in their home 24-hours a day at the touch of a button.

A state-of-the-art IT unit provides health checks around the clock, including measurements for blood pressure, pulse rate, oxygen levels in the blood and body weight.

The new project helps patients with long-term conditions monitor their health and manage their conditions at home.

The monitoring units are targeted at those most at risk of being admitted to hospital if their condition isn't managed appropriately, such as patients with diabetes, heart disease or Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), such as emphysema.

One patient who has used the system said: *"I love the fact that I am able to review my readings when the nurse visits and take my own oxygen saturation level if I am feeling unwell. It provides me with great reassurance."*

Helping babies to settle into their new home

The Special Care Baby Unit from North East Wales NHS Trust has a Community Neonatal team to help care for premature and seriously ill newborn babies.

The team of specialist staff can arrange for babies to be nursed at home on oxygen, which means that the new arrivals can leave hospital earlier and get used to their new surroundings at home.

Without the support of the community nurses, these babies would have to stay in hospital for months. The community team also provides telephone advice for parents to help them look after their baby at home and prevent re-admission to hospital.

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