REPORT

Into

LINk Workplan item

WAITING TIMES FOR PRESCRIPTIONS ON DISCHARGE FROM RUSSELLS HALL HOSPITAL

April 2012
1. REASON FOR INVESTIGATION

The issue of delays experienced by patients in obtaining prescriptions following discharge from Russells Hall Hospital has been examined by Dudley LINk since 2009.

The issue came to LINk by way of comments from the Dudley community and was investigated by:

- Requests for information from the community through the local press
- Highlighting this issue via social media, Facebook, Twitter etc
- Talking to the local community at events organised by LINk (drop-ins) and at local libraries throughout the borough

Some of the initial comments received:

- "On 4 occasions I have suffered delays in discharge to wait for a prescription. Each time I was in the departure lounge (apart from the time I refused to leave the ward). The last time this happened I had to wait over 2 hours – all I got was a box of paracetamol"

- "My son was discharged from the hospital 2 weeks ago. He was sent to the discharge lounge and had to wait from 11 – 7pm for his prescription. During this time the lady kept phoning up and chasing it and also offered a cup of tea and apologised"

- "discharge being delayed waiting for medication. We think they are getting round that by being given a prescription that you can not use at the hospital pharmacy as far as we know. Nobody given any information"
2. ACTION TAKED BY DUDLEY LINK

Initially, Dudley LINk brought this issue to the attention of the hospital via correspondence with the Chief Executive. The following response was received from the Chief Executive on 22 December 2009:

Thank you for your letter dated the 10th December 2009 in which you asked the following questions and I have replied to each one in turn below.

The LINk Management committee request that:

- A system is put in place to allow patients to dispense their prescription where possible from their local pharmacy.
- The Hospital ensure that their tracking system (IT) be put back in place to ensure effectiveness of speedy prescriptions.
- Address issues regarding long time periods before prescriptions are put on the system.

Hospital prescriptions are not available at community pharmacies for a number of reasons, the main ones being patient safety and cost to the health economy. Often the doses of medication are much higher from hospital prescriptions than from your local pharmacist or sometimes they are medications not available from local pharmacies. We take the safety of all our patients very seriously and there are many stages in the prescription process at the hospital which involve several checks put in place to protect people from harm. There is also an expectation from GPs that the hospital will ensure patients have the relevant medication on discharge from hospital.

You may wish to read a recent General Medical Council report which highlights the importance of the checks in place at hospitals in the prescribing process for the whole health economy.

However we do realise that on occasion there can be delays in patients receiving their prescriptions and therefore being able to leave hospital. We would like to reassure you we are working hard to ensure the timely discharge of all our patients particularly at this time of year when demands are high on our capacity. We currently have a consultancy ‘ATOS’ in the hospital working with teams on all stages of the patient journey through the hospital to help us improve our efficiency and prescriptions and the timely input of those onto the system will form part of that review.

We have also recently received the go ahead to allow patients who already have the right medications at home to be discharged without an addition prescription from the hospital. This will be particularly useful for patients with long term conditions and will again speed up the process.

The IT system - we are waiting for an upgrade to our system which will also improve the effectiveness of the prescribing process. It is on the list of IT changes that will be happening in the new financial year.
Dudley LINk continued to press for these delays to be reduced for patients, in particular the improvements to the IT system which were identified as a possible principle cause to some of the delays that patients had been encountering. Subsequently this item remained on the Dudley LINk workplan for the year 2009/10 and onward into 2010/11 as it was apparent that as comments regarding these delays were still being brought to the attention of the LINk.

In November 2010, Dudley Group of Hospitals were still unable to provide the LINk with an assurance that the improvements to the IT systems had been carried out.

A further response by the Chief Executive of Dudley Group of Hospitals was made to LINk on 5th August 2011:

We understand the concerns raised by the LINk in delays being caused to discharge of patients by their medications not being available.

We are continuing to work with the prescribers to speed up the prescribing and preparation of discharge medicines, however on occasion medical staff who write the prescriptions may be called away to a medical emergency of another patient. This inevitably causes delays in the system but we are working hard to try to avoid any delays. We have transformation projects looking at ways to improve the efficiency of our systems and are beginning to aim for 'home by lunch' wherever possible.

You are aware from previous correspondence that we have fully installed the electronic tracking system for pharmacy so that staff can track where a prescription is in the process and chase any delays where necessary.

Dudley LINk have not received any comments from residents or users of the hospital with regard to delays in prescriptions so far during 2012; previous comments received by LINk have been forwarded to the hospital as part of an ongoing monthly process of information sharing by LINk, which is hoped to have provided the hospital of evidence of concerns in order for this issue to have been addressed.

However in order to establish that the delays reported to Dudley LINk by local residents had been satisfactorily resolved it was agreed that an ‘Enter & View’ visit be carried out.
3. ENTER & VIEW VISIT TO EVALUATE PROGRESS

Enter and View Visit to Russells Hall Hospital Discharge Lounge on 26th April 2012

Visit began at 11.00 am Ian McGarry and Sue Solly were met by Karen Jeunzeums of PALs who showed them to ward C8 where the Discharge lounge is located. We were introduced to the Ward Manager, Sara Davis and the ward sister. Sue Solly and Ian McGarry explained their reason for the visit; briefly detailing the concerns regarding delays that had been made to Dudley LInk.

It was explained to Dudley LInk that, in the last 12 months a dedicated management team has been in operation. This has meant that staff are able to plan ahead more clearly and that staff are able to concentrate on the operation of the discharge lounge as a permanent role.

A number of initiatives had been put in place to try and speed up the discharge process. One of these was training nurses to write the prescriptions; these are then countersigned by the doctor having been checked by them against the patient’s notes (this has been seen to reduce some delays by up to 6 hours). It was explained that if there was a delay in medication the patients was given the opportunity to leave the hospital and return the next day for their medication it was not fully explained how this worked with ordering of ambulances. There can be a wait of up to four hours for ambulances

It was explained that not all patients go to the discharge lounge some remain on the ward until they can be collected; for example: patients who have issues with confusion, bed bound patients, infection control and patient with grade 2 pressure sores. There is a checklist of criterion for suitability for discharge from the lounge there is also a booking in and out system in place. There is a checklist to ensure that all points are covered regarding the requirement of the patient before they leave the hospital such as having keys, information to the family a checklist was supplied.

It was explained that every effort was made to speed the discharge process especially from the wards as this frees beds for incoming patients. Patients are now kept informed if a wait becomes prolonged and where the hold up is occurring

One of the other complaints from patients had been the lack of food once in the discharge lounge this has now been rectified and a dedicated hour is given for the provision of a meal. Drinks are available at all times.

Plans to improve the discharge lounge were show to Ian and Sue. The lounge has been moved to the third floor and is a ward bay on the IV unit and still looks very clinical. It was hoped to get charitable fund for screening, tables and chairs and make the room look more attractive.

The new design for the discharge is being funded by charitable funds, would make the lounge less like a hospital room and more homely for patients(see figure 1.)
We hope you find the discharge lounge comfortable and convenient. If you have any queries, please do not hesitate to speak to a member of staff who will be happy to help.

Welcome to the Discharge Lounge C8

Sara Davis—ward manager
Lisa Hodgkiss—Clinical support worker
Laura Westwood—Clinical support worker

There will be a Staff Nurse, and a Sister available.

Contact Number: 01384 456111
Ext: 2996

Welcome to the discharge lounge, which is based on ward C8 at Russells Hall Hospital.

This is an area for you to wait for your medication, or your lift home, once you have been discharged from your ward.

If you are waiting for medication to arrive, please be aware that this can take up to an hour once your prescription has reached pharmacy, however due to any unforeseen circumstances, this may sometimes be delayed. We will endeavor to do our best to get them back for you, as quickly as possible.

If you are able to get your own transport home, this will shorten your length of wait in the discharge lounge.

There is the option to go home, and we can call you when your medication is ready, if this is more convenient for you. Please make us aware if this is what you wish to do.

Welcome to the Discharge Lounge
On ward C8

On your way home!

Welcome to the discharge lounge, which is based on ward C8 at Russells Hall Hospital.

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Contact Number: 01384 456111
Ext: 2996

Welcome to C8

The discharge lounge is available for patients to wait for their medication, treatment or assistance. It is located on ward C8 at Russells Hall Hospital.

There will be a Staff Nurse, and a Sister available.

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Visit suspended between 12 noon and 1.00pm in order to comply with the hospital policy of protected mealtimes.

Patient interviews began approx 1.15pm

Patient 1.

Been waiting ages (said before 11 am) had some dinner but not fond of it. Staff have been very good. Not had to wait for tablets. Given a frame to take home (being discharged into nursing home). Wished I could have had a taxi.

Patient 2.

Waiting for an ambulance about 1 hour, looked after very well, they can’t do enough. Had something to eat and drink

Patient 3.

Waiting for an ambulance for between one and a half to two hours. Would like to have left by taxi rather than wait here for an ambulance.

Observations made:

- Food and drink was readily available for those waiting
- Magazines, a TV and radio were available
- Staff appeared happy in their role and helpful and kind
- Staff gave information to those waiting on a regular basis
- Regular contact was made with hospital transport to update patients on when their transport would be arriving.
- Wheelchairs were available on the ward for those needing them

Additional Information Supplied

- Apart from medication, transport and family members were a cause of delays as well as patients waiting to be seen by an ‘In Reach’ nurse for warfarin medication
- Outpatient Antimicrobial Therapy service started in February 2012. Patients requiring IV antibiotic can be discharged from the hospital and return for their IV treatment as needed as well as district nurses visiting homes to administer IV, also a service available at the walk in centre. This can also be administered in nursing homes. This service is believed to have saved approx 3000 bed days
- Staff were not aware that people were discharged from the main hospital during unsocial hours. Obviously patients attending EAU and ED usually wish to go home as soon as possible as they are often not admitted. It is not possible to prevent patients discharging themselves during unsocial hours
Conclusion.

During our visit we did not record any evidence that patients currently awaiting discharge were waiting for their medication to be prescribed.

Discharged patients who were waiting in the discharge lounged were happy with the information they had been given and had been offered food and drink.

Staff appeared dedicated to their work and to the wellbeing of those using the discharge lounge.

Recommendations

As a result of this visit Dudley LINk would recommend to Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust the following recommendations:

1. That the proposed improvements to the discharge lounge are made as soon as possible to provide a comfortable environment for patients

2. That the option be given to patients who are able to do so to leave the hospital by taxi rather than wait for the hospital transport (if they are able to pay for a taxi, and if staff consider it for them to do so and return to their own home)

Dudley LINk would like to thank the staff in the Discharge Lounge, PALS and Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust for their assistance with this visit.

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