



Rapid Response Hospital Discharge: Evaluation of the Dolphin Service in Bristol

Executive Summary



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why the Dolphin service was set up

- In response to challenges faced by the NHS in Bristol, in April 2019 the Dolphin Home from Hospital service was introduced to support the Health and Social Care 'Home First' fast track pathway. Patients admitted using this pathway should be assessed within 24 hours and returned home within 72 hours.
- The Dolphin service means that work can be completed to make the home safe within 48 hours allowing the patient to return home within the 72-hour target.
- This type of rapid response service requires dedicated capacity. It was not possible to deliver as part of the standard WE Care Handyperson service where work is timetabled in advance giving little room to operate in a fast and flexible manner.

How the service evolved over the first year

- In the early stages it was important to promote the service in person to raise awareness. At the beginning, the Dolphin technician was running the service end to end, including promotion, receiving referrals, carrying out the jobs and recording the data.
- As the number of referrals increased, administrative tasks were taken over by other WE Care colleagues to increase the resilience of the service and to free more time for completing work in people's homes.
- In recognition that relationships with the hospital and intermediate care teams needed to be broader than a single person, a second technician was trained, who joined the Dolphin team in January 2020.

What the Dolphin service delivered

- There was an upward trend in jobs completed per month as hospital and intermediate care teams became more aware of the service.
- Over 12 months the Dolphin service completed 461 jobs supporting 246 discharges which equated to 17% of all We Care Handyperson hospital activity.
- It exceeded the original target of 440 jobs.

- By Jan-Mar 2020 an average of 78 jobs per month were completed, which is four per day.
- A third of jobs were completed in within 24 hours.
- Most jobs involved fitting grabrails, stair rails and key safes.

The benefits of the service

- The service delivered significant benefits. It decreased the time that patients medically fit for discharge waited to return home, and the work completed allowed reablement and care to take place in the home. However, it is only one part of the discharge process and lack of capacity in care and reablement services or a change in a patient's medical condition can cause delays.
- Health and Social Care staff appreciated being able to work collaboratively with a service that they valued for its speed, flexibility, trustworthiness, reliability, and their ability to deal sensitively and effectively with patients and families.

Cost savings

- The service generated savings of a minimum of one bed day per client which **equates to savings for Health and Social Care of nearly £100,000 per year or £2 for every £1 invested.**
- From case study interviews we know that in at least three instances the work carried out prevented the loss of big care packages, saving over four weeks in hospital per person. This would result in savings of £11,000 person or £33,000 from just these cases alone.
- There was also £10,000 per year in savings in staff costs as hospital and intermediate care staff did not have to take time out to visit the home.
- **Overall savings are more likely to be £3 for every £1 invested.** This excludes the broader cost savings for Health and Social Care from patients enabled to remain safely at home rather than going into residential care.

Getting local and national recognition

Over the past 12 months Dolphin Society supported Hospital Discharge work has begun to get greater recognition as being a key part of regional and national hospital discharge processes:

- Inclusion in the Local Government Association High Impact Changes Model as an example of emerging best practice.
- In December 2019 the policy team of the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government visited We Care to learn more about the role of housing in hospital discharge and heard about the Dolphin fast track service.
- In January 2020 King's College London ran a series of events on improving transfers between hospital and home and We Care were invited to present the hospital discharge models, including the Dolphin fast track service.
- Most significantly, in February 2020 the We Care home from hospital service and Dolphin fast track service were presented to the NHS Urgent Care Oversight Board for inclusion in Winter Pressures recommendations for 2020/21.

Impact of Covid -19

- Although We Care did not experience a large increase in referrals during the Covid-19 crisis there have been several developments that will have a long-term beneficial impact. The Dolphin project is now a proven model for the future and has already been implemented in Bath and North East Somerset, where the council funded two Handypersons to be on standby for urgent discharges during the peak weeks of Covid-19 admissions.
- New ways of working between Health, Social Care and the voluntary sector during the crisis have established new communication networks that have worked well and will become 'business as usual'. WE Care are now involved in the recently established Integrated Control Centre in Bristol. This will reduce, although not remove, the need to constantly promote the service as the Dolphin service is now recognised as being a key part of the wider discharge system.
- The Health and Care service is having to adapt to a new normal of treating Covid-19 patients whilst maintaining other NHS services which have been suspended in recent months. The huge backlog in elective surgery will ensure that rapid hospital discharge will remain a priority for the future and the WE Care service will play an important role.
- It is recognised that WE Care will need to continue to raise awareness amongst Health and Care professionals because of the high number of individuals and teams involved and the regular turnover of staff in the wards.

Recommendations to increase impact

Any new service takes time to become established, but it is particularly difficult in complex systems such as hospital discharge where there are numerous staff, wards, and discharge hubs involved in the process. The Covid-19 pandemic has introduced changes to the discharge system in which the voluntary sector is more firmly involved, but this is still evolving:

1. For the Dolphin service to receive funding over a longer period, ideally three years, to allow it to become fully established as a key part of the Bristol hospital discharge system.
2. That the capacity of the Dolphin service is looked at once a more settled pattern of hospital discharge has been re-established – this may involve using the existing hospital discharge handypersons in a more flexible way to provide support.
3. Continue to develop the relationship with the Integrated Control Centre and Sirona, the community care provider, to ensure that the referral process works effectively.
4. Broaden and deepen the relationship with the Red Cross, the other main provider of hospital discharge services from the VCSE sector.
5. When the WE Care IT management system is upgraded ensure that the NHS number and dates of hospital admission and discharge are included to be able to better evaluate the impact of all WE Care hospital discharge services, including Dolphin. It is also important that staff can easily input data remotely.
6. Continue to review and streamline the WE Care internal referral communication pathway to ensure that referrals are dealt with effectively by the most appropriate person
7. Work with the Health and Social Care discharge teams to collect information on customer satisfaction with all parts of the discharge process, including the Dolphin service