

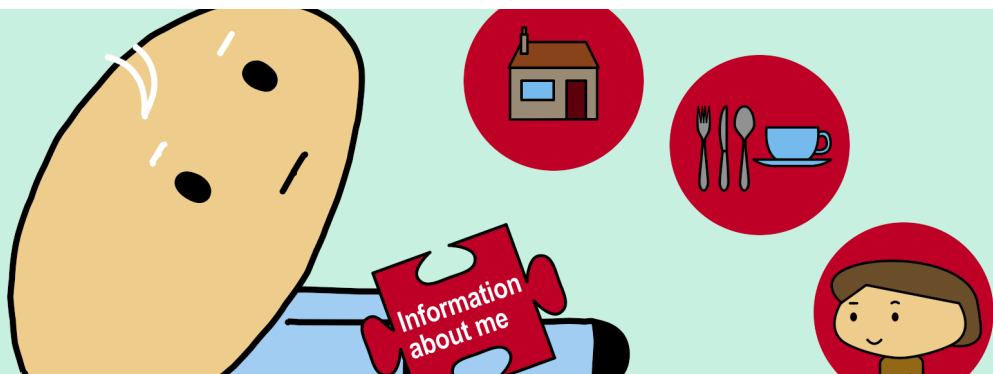


ARC BITE

Brokering Innovation Through Evidence

What causes delays in discharging frail older patients from hospital?

June 2021



There are often delays in discharging elderly and frail patients from hospital. These delays can be upsetting for patients and families, and cost the NHS around £820m a year.

People who are elderly and frail are more likely to struggle after even a minor illness or a change in medication or environment. Once in hospital, older people are vulnerable to infections, falls, confusion, pressure sores, and malnutrition. Without their usual support, they might lose strength and the confidence to manage independently.

Discharging these patients can take longer as it often involves different professionals

and organisations. There are recommended ways to reduce delays, but these aren't always used across the NHS.

What was the aim of the project?

We wanted to find out what happens on hospital wards that might lead to delays in discharge. We also wanted to explore how to help hospital and community staff use our recommended improvements.

What did we do?

We worked with ward staff from two NHS hospitals in the South West and West Midlands, and community and social care staff. We observed the hospital stays of 37 patients over 80 with moderate to severe frailty, and spoke to patients, family members and staff about their experiences.



What did we learn?

We found that working practices in the hospitals may have inadvertently contributed to delays.

Different types of information about a patient were collected, recorded and accessed in different ways by different professionals. We called this 'de-constructing' the patient. For a patient to be discharged, all these pieces of information have to be found and put back together – or 're-constructed'. This can take time.

We found that information about a patient's home life and how they were before their hospital stay was very important during the discharge process. We called this 'Information About Me'.

What we saw

"They were looking in his written and electronic notes for a list of investigations, results and previous admissions and treatments. This took around 5-10 minutes and were still left with a lot of uncertainty about what had happened both recently and in the past. The junior doctor joked that 'it was like being a detective trying to find and then piece together all the information'"

Fieldnotes, Site A

What next?

Our research led to these recommendations:

- Promote the metaphor of patient de-construction and re-construction among professionals to raise awareness of the role of 'Information About Me'
- New forms should avoid standardised questions, to allow the patient's personal story to be shared in a narrative, rather than using tick boxes
- Work with patient and carer organisations to highlight the key role of 'Information About Me' to patients, families and carers

What they said

"If we just deal with the acute problem, you tend to miss the bigger picture, so that's why we gather all that information and then make a plan which involves early discussions with the relatives ... so pulling all of that together and moving forward."

Consultant geriatrician, Site A

"I used to find it frustrating that I'm not allowed to spend half an hour talking to someone but I am allowed to charge the hospital for an x-ray, blood tests ... But as you develop as a doctor, you realise that doesn't give you as much information as spending half an hour talking to them. So now I spend half an hour talking to them and I order less tests."

Junior doctor, Site B

"Quite often you are asked for a history...it's distressing enough as it is...It felt like each time I went to visit Mum, I met a different nurse who wrote things down on a piece of paper in Mum's file, each time I felt like I was explaining the same thing. It was like Groundhog Day."

Daughter/carer Site A

Our Information About Me campaign includes a short animation to explain what patients and family members can do to help with hospital discharge. We also created an example Information About Me form.

We will work closely with hospitals to introduce Information About Me forms.

Find out more

Read the paper:
bit.ly/PatientDischargePaper

arc-w.nihr.ac.uk/information-about-me/