

How do I get help when the person I care for is about to leave hospital?

Discharge Planning

Carers say it is the first few weeks when they are newly caring for someone just returned home from hospital that make all the difference to whether they feel able to take on a caring role. If during that time they are offered information, advice, help and support, they feel able to make an informed choice about how to tackle their new role. But what happens at discharge is critical to the success of the carer's role in those first difficult weeks.

However, sometimes discharge planning doesn't go as smoothly as it should - for a number of reasons. Sometimes in the busy ward the medical staff are understandably pre-occupied with the next sick patient and finding beds. They may assume that a patient is well enough to go home and can manage when they get there. Sometimes when people are asked if they can manage at home they say "yes I'll be fine" because they fear being kept in hospital and they don't realize that help might be available when they get home. If you are the carer of someone who is in hospital and you are concerned about how you and they will manage when they get home then talk to the nursing staff. They should contact the hospital social care team (now known as Rapid Response) who will talk to you about your concerns and what help they may be able to offer you at home, which is usually free for a few weeks.

Who are all these people and how can they help me!!!!???

Rapid Response

Formally the hospital social care department - Rapid Response is the service that can offer support where appropriate if a patient needs extra help and support for a few weeks when they are well enough to go home. This is usually free as it comes under the NHS. If more longer term help is needed a referral should then be made to

Community (or locality) Social Care Team - Care Manager

Formally known as Social Workers. This person is the key to arranging any care for the person you look after. They should carry out a full assessment of the person's needs and their finances. Then they will inform you what help can be provided and if there will be a cost involved. They may be very busy and stressed - try to be nice to them! Even if they don't ring you when you want them to! - you need them on your side!

Occupational Therapist or OT

OTs specialise in giving practical guidance and will visit you at home and make an assessment of how safe and suitable (or not) the surroundings are for the person you look after and their needs. They can then make suggestions or provide equipment to help.

Carers Support Team

This team is there for you - as a carer. They are a Carers support organisation not social services, and can tell you about any benefits you may be entitled to, and meetings and outings where you can meet up with other carers. Also there for you to talk to about difficult issues and feelings. Always very 'nice' - though bear in mind we are slightly biased as we are writing this!

Physiotherapist

Another practical person, the physio's job is to get people moving again when appropriate, so they will encourage, explain, give exercises etc. Sometimes need to be the bad guys as they have to push people to try harder than they might want to!

District Nurses

Attached to large surgeries, so your nurses may work from a nearby big practice that covers your area. District Nurses will visit to change dressings, give certain medication, help with catheters, etc.

Carers UK offers a discharge good practice guide at www.carersuk.org