

Improving hospital patient care by cutting long stays



In a joint announcement, NHS England and NHS Improvement said they will spearhead a campaign to cut long stays in hospitals. Shorter stays will benefit patients who would otherwise be stuck in hospital when they are well enough to leave.

Many older people, particularly those who are frail and may have dementia, actually deteriorate while in hospital – a stay of more than 10 days leads to 10 years' muscle ageing for people most at risk.

"No one wants patients to stay in hospital longer than they have to, or for the health of patients to deteriorate in the very place that is supposed to be making them better," said Ian Dalton, Chief Executive of NHS Improvement. "But this is happening all too often and we have to work together to change it. Every day in hospital is a precious day away from normal life."

In addition to improving patient care by reducing unnecessary hospital days, the campaign aims to free up thousands of hospital beds and ease pressures next winter.

The NHS, working with local authorities, seeks to reduce the number of long staying patients by around a quarter, freeing up more than 4,000 beds in time for the winter surge.

NHS England's Chief Executive, Simon Stevens, said: "Over this past year hospitals and local councils have successfully worked together and have turned the corner on delays in patients being discharged. Now they need to go further in order to ensure patients are treated with dignity and looked after in the right setting for them."

The joint announcement comes as the NHS is drawing up plans for next winter after having been hit by a perfect storm of bad weather, flu and stomach bugs, along with record A&E attendances and emergency admissions, in the winter just gone.

The new drive aims to build on the success of the NHS and local councils in tackling delayed transfers of care (DTOCs). The number of DTOCs fell to 4,880 in January, 1,780 fewer than the baseline month of February 2017.

To meet the ambition NHS trusts will be expected to close the gap between the number of patients discharged during the week and those sent home at the weekend and make greater use of alternatives to admission such as emergency day cases or therapy services.

Hospital stays above the best practice guidelines will be treated as a safety issue that urgently needs addressing with the time patients have spent on wards closely monitored through the Patient Administration System.

Trusts will be supported by extended GP access and a focus on avoiding unnecessary hospital admissions including more support for care home staff to prevent residents being admitted. There will also be regional emergency care intensive support teams charged with helping to deliver 25 percent of the campaign's target results.

In welcoming the NHS's new drive, Sally Copley, Director of Policy and Campaigns at Alzheimer's Society, said: "For too long people with dementia have been pulled from pillar to post in our not-fit-for-purpose health and social care system. It's great to see the Government sitting up and taking this issue seriously with an integrated approach, and more support for care home staff is definitely welcome."

Source: [NHS England](#)

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