

HEALTH AND CARE INSIGHTS

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Preparing for winter

We are preparing for increased demand for health and care services over the winter by supporting local people to keep well and providing a range of alternatives to hospital admissions. Viral infections such as flu and norovirus can sweep quickly through our communities and cause serious health issues for vulnerable adults and children, so all staff are being offered the flu vaccination and we are encouraging local people to get their flu jab.

We have a wide range of seven-day services now available in the community which we will be fully utilising to respond to the anticipated winter surge. We aim to avoid the need for a hospital admission and keep any necessary hospital stays to a safe minimum. Research shows that just ten days in hospital leads to the equivalent of ten years of ageing in the muscles of people aged over 80. This is some of the evidence behind our mantra that **'the best bed is your own bed'**. This year, thanks to our new integrated care model, we have additional resources available to support people at home and in their community. Our winter plan is all geared around supporting people to keep well and out of hospital – unless that is the best place for the care they need.

Preventing unnecessary hospital admissions

As a result of increased investment in providing intensive support to people at home, we are able to treat more conditions out of hospital. For example, if you need intravenous antibiotics, the traditional place to receive this is in hospital. However, our specially trained nurses can now provide this treatment in people's own homes, under the direction of a doctor.

We are also introducing new projects across our hospital's emergency services to make sure that we don't admit people for a hospital stay when they can safely go home. Up to one in three people who come to our Emergency Department (ED) and need some medical treatment could go home the same day. We make sure any emergency patients see a senior doctor as soon as possible, and those doctors are asking themselves: "What can we do to get you home today?" When they assess that someone can be quickly treated and safely discharged home the same day – even if they need further tests or support in the community – the doctor will refer them to our Emergency Ambulatory Unit. This unit will open seven days a week from 3 December, and will continue to take referrals from GPs, as well as from our ED.

We will only discharge people we are confident are medically fit and can manage safely back in the community. In last month's newsletter, we featured our new Rapid Access Discharge Service (RADS) team. The RADS team is made up of senior nurses, therapists and discharge co-ordinators. They work in ED making sure older people who may be managing a number of chronic conditions are assessed quickly and not admitted unnecessarily. Together, they conduct a holistic assessment, taking into account physical, social and mental needs, and arrange for the person's onward care at home or in a community setting.

Mary's story

Mary, pictured with senior nurse Dawn Thomas, is just one of the people our RADS team have supported recently. She was brought in to Torbay Hospital's Emergency Department in an ambulance



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after she told her daily carer she was feeling unwell. Mary lives alone and, in addition to her daily carer who helps with her personal care, she has a neighbour who calls in throughout the day to check if she needs anything. This kind neighbour came to the hospital and met Mary in the Emergency Department, where she was seen by a doctor who diagnosed a chest infection which needed treating with intravenous antibiotics.

Normally, in the busy Emergency Department environment, the doctor would have admitted Mary in order for her to receive this treatment; but the RADS team were able to immediately assist the doctor and organise for a specialist team to administer Mary with intravenous antibiotics at home. As a result, Mary avoided a hospital admission which would have lasted at least three days – she was glad to be able to go home.

What can you do to help yourself?

Research shows that healthy people cope better with winter ailments, so self-care is a way of fending off the bugs – things like eating and drinking sensibly, stopping smoking, getting regular exercise and properly managing any regular medications. For those who do succumb to a winter virus, minor conditions such as headaches, colds and back pain can be treated by a pharmacist, who can offer a range of solutions and advice without the need of a GP.

Anyone who has had the flu will know how debilitating it can be. But it can be life-threatening for vulnerable groups including the over 65s, very young children, pregnant women and people whose immune systems are compromised. The NHS offers free flu jabs at GP surgeries and pharmacies for all these people – make sure you have yours if you are eligible, as it will reduce the risk of catching flu. Over recent weeks we have been busy vaccinating our staff: they have the 'jab' to help protect vulnerable people in their care.

Personal plea from our Chief Executive, Mairead McAlinden

"We are working very hard to keep our hospitals and community services free from Norovirus and Influenza at this busy time of year. We assess every patient coming into our hospitals for any infection that could put themselves or others at risk, and when patients with an infection need to be admitted we quickly move them to designated beds to protect them and our other patients and staff. Our dedicated clinical and hospital cleaning staff work really hard to maintain our high standards of decontamination and infection control which limits any spread of infection. But we also need the help of our local community to keep our hospitals, care homes and community facilities as infection-free as possible. We know how much our patients appreciate visitors while they are in hospital, but if you are experiencing any infectious illness such as flu, vomiting or stomach upset, please do not visit until you are 48 hours symptom free. If you become unwell whilst visiting please inform a member of staff straightaway. By doing this, you will be helping us to keep our patients and staff safe and free from infection."



We hope you find this update useful and that you can see we are making real progress towards our aim of supporting more people to be well and independent. If you would like to receive future issues by email contact tsdft.communications@nhs.net