



Health and Social Care Information Guides

Delayed Discharge

Brief description

A delayed discharge occurs when a patient, clinically ready for discharge, cannot leave the hospital because the other necessary care, support or accommodation for them is not readily accessible and/or funding is not available to purchase a care home place. A summary definition of 'ready for discharge' is 'an inpatient whose move onto the next stage of care is delayed for non-clinical reasons'.

National Policy and Key Developments

Key developments and current requirements

- Mid 1990s – Ministerial concern to combat NHS “winter pressures”.
- 1998 – Establishment of a Multi-agency Working Group (MAWG) to develop a meaningful national standard definition of a delayed discharge.
- 1999/2000 – Data recording trial using the MAWG definitions.
- 2000 – Joint Future Group sought joint hospital discharge/rapid response teams.
- March 2002 – launch of the Executive's Delayed Discharge Action Plan [Delayed Discharges in Scotland](#), setting out a range of short and longer term actions needed to resolve the delayed discharge problem, and providing for an additional £20 million funding to local authority/NHS partnerships to tackle this problem, including the delivery of 1,000 extra care packages.
- March 2002 – Letter from the Chief Executive of NHSScotland giving local partnerships targets for reductions in the acute sector and for extra patients to be transferred to more appropriate care, and requiring [Joint Action Plans](#) with joint planning and working across local government, the NHS and the voluntary sector seen as essential for the delivery of improvements.
- October 2002 – Increase in additional funding announced to £30 million per year over three years, with partnerships to produce new Joint Action Plans to further reduce delayed discharges. [Delayed Discharge Learning Network](#) established.

- 2002 – Spending Review 2002 extends the commitment to spending £30 million each year from 2003-04 to 2005-06 to tackle delayed discharge.
- 2003 – Range and Capacity Review established to consider future provision of community care services for older people.
- December 2003 – Tripartite Group established to look at new ways to take forward the policy on tackling delayed discharges.
- January 2004 – A [Framework for the Production of Joint Hospital Discharge Protocols](#) was issued, and there was new guidance on [Choice of Accommodation](#).
- September 2004 – Announcement of target reduction in delayed discharge by 20 per cent each year until 2008, and that seasonal fluctuations in the figures must end, with sustained reductions quarterly.
- October 2004 – £30m funding for delayed discharge extended under Spending Review 2004 to 2007-08.
- March 2005 – Tripartite Working Group report on Delayed Discharge presented to Minister making a number of recommendations:
<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/care/17420/Report>
- February 2006 – Revised targets agreed with partnerships and announced by Minister.
 - For 2006-07
 - to reduce all delays over 6 weeks by 50%
 - to free up 50% of all beds occupied by delayed patients in short-stay beds
 - For 2007-08
 - to reduce to zero patients delayed over 6 weeks
 - to reduce to zero those delayed in short-stay beds.
- May 2006 – Record low level of patients delayed in hospital as 2005-06 targets are exceeded. At the April census there were 498 patients delayed for more than 6 weeks, down 73% since the launch of the Action Plan.

Indicators

NHS Boards have been required to provide ‘Patients Ready for Discharge’ data on a quarterly basis since September 2000 according to national standard definitions and data recording criteria laid out in SEHD Management Executive Letter (MEL)(2000) 07. Published figures include numbers of patients ready for discharge, reasons and duration and are shown at the level of NHS Board area, and local authority. Since the April 2004 census the report has focused mainly on those patients who have been ready for discharge for more than six weeks at the time of the census. There is also a strong focus on reducing extended delayed discharges; anyone waiting over 12 months is unacceptable.

Pressures on the service

Delays in discharging patients from hospital cause a great number of difficulties across the health, community care and housing sectors. They can undermine quality of life and increase dependency on institutional care for those in hospital. They can create pressures to make institutional placements, rather than arrangements in the community, and affect the choice of placement. They can contribute to an increase in waiting times for people needing hospital in-patient treatment.

Implications for Joint Working

Health and social care partnerships have agreed joint delayed discharge plans and jointly agree how new resources will be deployed. However, experience and research have demonstrated that there is no quick or easy way to deal with the issue of delayed discharge. Problems within both health and social care organisations have been attributed with causing delayed discharges. A literature review has suggested that a range of initiatives within a whole systems approach may be most effective overall in tackling the problem of delayed discharges. These initiatives should focus not just on facilitating earlier discharge but in preventing avoidable admission to hospital.

Relevant legislation and statutory guidance

Management Executive Letter (MEL) (2000) 07 issued February 2000 - **Mandatory quarterly collection of delayed discharge data** according to national standard definitions and data recording criteria.

http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk/sehd/mels/2000_7.htm

Delayed Discharges in Scotland Report to the Minister for Health and Community Care, 5 March 2002

<http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk/sehd/publications/dc20020305delaydisch.pdf>

Letter from Health Department, Trevor Jones, Head of Department and Chief Executive, NHS Scotland, issued March 2002, regarding the **Delayed Discharges Report and Action Plan**

<http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk/sehd/publications/dc20020320delaydisch.pdf>

Community Care Division Circular **Choice of Accommodation - Discharge from Hospital** (CCD 8/2003) issued January 2004

http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk/sehd/publications/CC2003_08.pdf

Community Care Division Circular **Framework for the Production of Joint Hospital Discharge Protocols** (CCD 9/2003) issued January 2004

http://www.show.scot.nhs.uk/sehd/publications/CC2003_09.pdf

How can I find out more?

If you want to find out more about delayed discharge, including policy initiatives and good practice, visit the Scottish Executive's Delayed Discharge website. This part of the Executive's website contains key documents and publications and contact details for the policy team within the Executive that leads on delayed discharge

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/about/HD/CCD1/00017420/ddHome.aspx>

Delayed Discharge Learning Network - Contains good practice resource and information about events

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/about/HD/CCD1/00017420/learnshare.aspx>

Joint Local Action Plans for Delayed Discharge

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/care/17420/9206>

Other Useful Reports and Publications

Delayed Discharges: Definitions and data recording manual (June 2006)

<http://www.isdscotland.org/isd/files/Delayed%20Discharges%20-%20Definitions%20and%20Data%20Recording%20Manual.pdf>

Whole system modelling for delayed discharge (June 2005) Audit Scotland

<http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk/publications/ddischarges.htm>

Patients Ready for Discharge (Delayed Discharges) from NHS hospitals in Scotland (2000 - 2005) ISD Scotland. Numbers of patients ready for discharge, reasons and duration shown at the level of NHS Board area, NHS Trust and Local Authority.

http://www.isdscotland.org/isd/info3.jsp?pContentID=1208&p_applic=CCC&p_service=Content.show&

Gill Hubbard, Guro Huby, Sally Wyke, Markus Themessl-Huber **Tackling delayed discharge: a research review Health and Community Care**, Scottish School of Primary Care (2004) Research Programme Research Findings No.41/2004

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/cru/resfinds/hcc41-00.asp>

Simpson C, Marnoch G **Bed-blocking in the National Health Service in Scotland: a study of bed-blocking in Scottish National Health Service Trusts; its nature and extent.** (1999) Health Bulletin (Edinburgh) 1999 Mar; 57(2):99-107

http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/entrez/query.fcgi?cmd=Retrieve&db=PubMed&list_uids=12811901&dopt=Abstract