**Hospital discharge**

*Template press release*

**HEALTHWATCH PRESS RELEASE**
Embargoed: 11:00 Tuesday 21st July 2020

**UNDERSTANDING HOSPITAL DISCHARGE in [insert local area] DURING THE PANDEMIC**

* **Healthwatch is seeking to find out how emergency discharge measures implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic have impacted on patients**
* **As events unfolded, hospitals across England were told to discharge patients who no longer needed medical care within hours rather than days**
* **The project aims to gather stories from patients, carers and families in [insert local area] to understand the benefits and challenges these extraordinary arrangements have brought**

A new Healthwatch project is seeking to find out how rapid discharge arrangements implemented during COVID-19 have impacted on patients, families and carers in [**insert local area.**]

As the full scale of the pandemic became apparent in March, hospitals were told to discharge patients who no longer needed medical care [within just two hours](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/880288/COVID-19_hospital_discharge_service_requirements.pdf).

This was seen as necessary in order to free up beds for the expected sudden influx of a large number of COVID-19 patients. It involved a range of emergency measures being introduced to dramatically speed up the discharge process, which included:

* care and support needs being assessed after rather than before a patient left hospital
* people being moved to the first available bed in a care home in the first instance
* any further care or support needs being fully funded by the NHS to remove the time lost to processes such as means testing

The changes have helped manage the increased demand placed on hospitals by coronavirus but the subsequent effects of the emergency measures on those most closely affected have not yet been widely assessed.

Healthwatch England, with support from the British Red Cross and local Healthwatch, is carrying out a major piece of work to better understand the impact of the approach to hospital discharge during the pandemic. This will gather vital learning ahead of a possible second wave of mass infections and hospital admissions.

The project will include a [large-scale survey](https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/tell-us-about-your-experience-leaving-hospital-during-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic) and will be particularly focused on groups who are known to have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic including those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds and older people.

INSERT IF APPLICABLE: [Insert local Healthwatch name] is one of eight local Healthwatch nationally which is also supporting the campaign by carrying out targeted interviews with key individuals, including health, voluntary sector and social care staff.

[Insert quote from regional CQC/local Healthwatch spokesperson or provider]

**Healthwatch Chair Sir Robert Francis QC said:**

*“Emergency measures, the removal of organisational boundaries and unrestricted funding have resulted in people being discharged from hospital in timescales which would have seemed unrealistic before the pandemic.*

*“Some of these changes will undoubtedly have led to a better experience for patients but there are reports of less positive experiences and there may have been unforeseen consequences. We need people to tell us about their experiences so we can better understand this issue – particularly people from those groups which have sadly been especially badly affected by COVID-19, including older people and those from black and minority ethnic communities.*

*“Their feedback we receive from this project will then be shared with leaders from across the health and social care sector to help shape hospital discharge arrangements as we continue to manage the risk of COVID-19 alongside the restoration of more services, and ultimately determine future long-term arrangements for patient discharge.”*

British Red Cross Chief Executive Mike Adamson said:

"We have long been advocating for processes that make sure people’s needs are met when they leave hospital. These include ensuring people get home safely, that they have food in the fridge, heating, hot water and people checking in on them, picking up prescriptions as needed.

“This pandemic required urgent changes to hospital discharge arrangements to ensure hospitals had enough capacity to respond to the needs of COVID-19 patients.

"We're pleased to be supporting Healthwatch England to learn more about people’s experiences of leaving hospital at this time. It's important that any lessons are learnt so that when it comes to hospital discharge the health and social care system is as prepared as it can be for whatever challenges this winter brings."

People in [insert local area] are being asked to taketen minutes to fill-in this short survey, (<https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/tell-us-about-your-experience-leaving-hospital-during-covid-19-pandemic>) reflecting on their experiences or the experiences of a loved one or someone they care for.

The survey will run for four weeks from today (Tuesday, July 21st 2020) to August 16 2020.

The project forms part of the [‘Because we all Care’](https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/news/2020-07-08/help-health-and-social-care-services-recover-covid-19-becauseweallcare) campaign which Healthwatch recently launchedin partnership with the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

‘Because we all care’ is a long-running campaign aimed at promoting the benefits of sharing experiences and encouraging more people to submit with their feedback – particularly as normal face-to-face activity used by local Healthwatch branches to gather patient views is currently not possible due to the pandemic.

The intelligence gathered through the campaign will then be shared with national health and social care leaders to ensure patients’ views and experiences are fully taken into account as the sector changes in response to the pandemic and its after-effects.

**ENDS**

**Notes to Editors:**

**About Healthwatch [insert local area**]: Healthwatch [insert local area] is the [county’s/borough’s/city’s etc.] independent health and social care champion. It exists to ensure that people are at the heart of care. Teams of staff and volunteers listen to what people like about local health and social care services, and what could be improved. These views are then shared with the decision-making organisations, so together a real difference can be made. More information: [[insert](http://www.healthwatchgloucestershire.co.uk/) website address].

[**About Healthwatch England**](https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/)**:**We are the independent champion for people who use health and social care services. We’re here to find out what matters to people and help make sure their views shape the support they need. There is a local Healthwatch in every area of England. We support local Healthwatch to listen to what people like about services, and what could be improved, and we share these views with those with the power to make change happen. We help people find the information they need about services in their area. Nationally and locally, we have the power to make sure that those in charge of services hear people's voices.