



**Northumbria Healthcare**  
NHS Foundation Trust

# **A carer's guide – when someone you care for is in hospital**

Issued by the patient experience team

**building a caring future**

HOSPITAL | COMMUNITY | HOME

[www.northumbria.nhs.uk](http://www.northumbria.nhs.uk)

A guide for anyone looking after a family member or friend who needs help because of their illness or disability.

## **Other useful information to ask for:**

### **Ward information**

Each ward offers an individual information sheet on admission.

### **Northumberland Carers' Guide and Wellbeing Check**

Local information for carers including helpful tips about ways to make the caring role easier and how to get help when you need it.

### **'This is Me' for people with dementia**

### **'Hospital Passport for people with a Learning Disability'**

These are simple tools you can use to provide a snapshot of the person, including their likes, dislikes and interests. This information will help the ward staff to better understand the needs of the patient.

The nurse responsible for the person and a main contact for you is:

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## Coming into hospital

When someone comes into hospital, as a matter of good practice we ask if there is a family member or friend, who they rely on for support now or when they leave hospital.

Sometimes it is not possible for the patient to give us this information, so it is important to let the staff know as early as possible if you have, or expect to take on, a caring role; the support you provide can be physical or emotional and can range from a few hours a week to around the clock care.

If there is more than one person in the family providing support, we will ask the patient or family, to agree who is the main carer so that we can communicate with one person to help us manage nursing time efficiently.

When someone you care for is in hospital, it can be a very worrying and stressful time. Don't be afraid to voice your concerns to ward staff.

If you would benefit from having someone to talk to, there are a number of people who may be able to help.

### Carer's tip

'I didn't want to think of myself as a carer, I'm his wife – but it is important to recognise the role so that you can access the help and information you need.'

Speak to the nursing staff or clinical team managing the person's care, the Patient Advice Liaison Service (PALS), the hospital chaplain, or call the carers' service in your area.

If the person you care for has a learning disability you can ask to speak to the hospital learning disability liaison nurse.

Contact numbers are listed at the back of this leaflet.

## Carer's tip

Stress can take its toll on your own health, try to make sure that you eat and sleep regularly and that you have some time away from the hospital to clear your mind.

Tell the ward if you need to use the time the person is in hospital as a break from caring, they will understand and agree a way of keeping in touch.

**The main concern for both you and the hospital will be that the person you care for receives the best available treatment and that their stay in hospital is as relaxed as possible. This will be achieved by you and the hospital staff working in partnership, and respecting each other's roles.**

## What can I expect from hospital staff?

- Recognition and respect of your role, experience and knowledge in caring for the person, whatever your age.
- To be listened to, and involved in decisions about the person you care for (with consent or if decisions impact on you).
- An opportunity to express your views separately.
- Enough time for you to think about the care you may need to provide, agree the type of care tasks and amount of support you are able to offer.
- To be given the information and advice you need to help you care safely and effectively.
- A response to your own needs and help to access information about support available to you as a carer.
- Courtesy at all times, understanding that the situation is stressful for you and for the person you care for.

### Carer's checklist

Who is the main contact nurse?

How should I contact the ward?

Do they know I am the main carer?

Do they have my contact number?

How do I arrange to see the Consultant?

## What will hospital staff expect from me?

- A willingness to introduce yourself to staff because it helps them to put a name to a face.
- Ward staff to be made aware of relevant information about the person to help them to provide individualised care.
- Help in communicating with the person if they have communication or memory difficulties.
- A contact telephone number for you as a carer.
- Polite and courteous behaviour, however stressed you are.
- Understanding that the person you need to speak to may not always be available.
- That you do not visit if you are unwell or have an infection, for example a heavy cold or diarrhoea.
- Understanding that personal information about the person will only be discussed with their prior consent (see page 8).
- If you don't understand something, don't be afraid to ask for it to be repeated, explained or written down.

### Carer's tip

'If the person you care for has dementia or a learning disability **'This is Me'** or the **'Hospital Passport'** are simple tools you can use to provide a snapshot of the person, including their likes, dislikes and interests.'

Ask ward staff for information.

## Can I offer support outside visiting hours?

Carers often feel compelled to stay with the person they support to comfort and reassure them, but also to ensure their safety and needs are understood and met.

If you wish to participate in the care of the person in hospital because they have special needs, discuss with the nursing staff on the ward whether it would be appropriate for you to do that.

If you need information about B&B or hotel accommodation close by, contact PALS.

### Carer's tip

'I used Just Visiting to keep my family informed; it's a free and secure online visiting room. You just register, then log on to write messages to keep loved ones in touch.'

[www.justvisiting.com](http://www.justvisiting.com)

## Do I have the authority to speak on behalf of the person I care for?

If the person you care for is an adult and is capable of understanding what is happening, they can expect to make their own decisions about the care they receive. They can also expect that information about them will be treated as confidential by hospital staff.

If you feel there is uncertainty over their mental capacity, explain your concerns to the hospital staff as soon as possible. The person should only be asked to sign consent forms for treatment if they are capable of understanding the implications.

The Mental Capacity Act (2005) is a process of what to do when someone lacks capacity to make decisions. It covers anyone over the age of 16 and sets out who can make decisions in which situations, and how they should go about it.

Tell the ward staff if the person you care for has made an advance plan or directive, so that this information can be used to inform decisions about care and treatment, especially if the person is reaching the end of their life.

If you have lasting power of attorney you will be consulted about future and best interest decisions if the person has lost capacity.

Even without formal authority, if you are the main carer or next of kin and you have any concerns about care or treatment, these should be raised initially with the ward manager/nurse in charge at the earliest possible opportunity.

### Carer's tip

'I found "A guide for family, friends and other unpaid carers" about mental capacity really useful, search online or ask your local carers centre to download a copy for you.'

## What about decisions that affect me and the information I may need?

We will ensure you receive as much information as possible to help you in your caring role. If you are the main carer, you will generally be given factual information such as ward details, name of consultant and updates.

If you need to take on a caring task, for instance helping with medication or rehabilitation at home, we will give you the advice you need to care safely.

You do have to remember, however, that hospitals are bound by very strict patient confidentiality and we can decline to give information if we believe that it is in the best interest of the patient to do so or if they have indicated that they do not want information passed on.

We will, however, explain to the person you care for the reasons why sharing information with you is important and agree any particular information they wish to withhold.

As a carer you should also expect that information you disclose will also be treated as confidential by hospital staff and may not be shared without your consent.

### Carer's Checklist

Can I speak to you separately when I need to?

Can I tell you things that will not be shared with the person I care for?

## Leaving hospital

### Will I be consulted before the person I care for is moved to another ward, hospital, or discharged home?

You will not necessarily be consulted over change of wards although you should be informed as early as possible.

We will, however, talk to you in advance of any proposed change of hospital.

You should always be involved in the assessment for discharge if you are intending to provide care or support.

It may be difficult for you to talk about the level of care you can provide or to share your concerns in the presence of the person you care for so we will try to speak to you separately.

### Carer's Checklist

Will I be involved in discharge decisions?

Are there any local groups that can provide support?

How can I get advice about the care I may need to provide?

### What if I feel I could not cope if the person I care for comes back home?

Don't keep your concerns to yourself. If you think that professionals are making mistaken assumptions about what you can cope with, let them know. You should be given the opportunity to explain what difficulties you might face and what you will and won't be able to do.

Before the person is discharged from hospital, there will be an assessment of their needs and sometimes a home visit to see how they cope with everyday tasks.

If the person needs to be supported for the first time it is important to make sure the right support and services are put in place.

Professionals from health and social care will work with you to ease the move in a planned way including arranging rehabilitation support if appropriate.

If community support services are already in place for the person you care for, the main issue for discharge planning is to make sure those services and support will continue as before or are adapted if needs have changed. The care manager or social worker will be involved in plans for leaving hospital.

### **Carer's tip**

Caring and juggling other commitment isn't easy, so please ask for help – don't feel you have to sort everything out yourself.

## **What is a carer's assessment?**

This is an opportunity to discuss with social care the help you need to maintain your own health and wellbeing and to balance caring with other aspects of your life, like work and family. If caring is having a significant impact on your wellbeing, the assessment may suggest you are entitled to social care support.

Even if you refuse a carer's assessment, your ability to manage your caring role must be taken into account when planning support for the person you care for.

You don't have to have a carer's assessment to get advice about available support. Your local carers' service is a good place to start.

To request a carer's assessment speak to social services. Or you can ask the care manager or social worker, if you have one.

## Carer's Checklist

Is there anything else I need to know?

For example; managing medicines, arrangements for monitoring rehabilitation?

How can I get my needs as a carer assessed?

Who can I contact if I need more help?

## What should I expect to be given upon discharge?

A person may be discharged with medication, prescriptions, discharge/aftercare information leaflets, and often a copy of a letter for the doctor. It is a good idea to check with the nurse if any of these things are needed before the person you care for leaves the ward.

**Finally, your health is important too, so don't forget to look after yourself. If you need to come into hospital for treatment yourself please remember to tell the staff that you are a carer and they will help to arrange community support if necessary.**

## Useful contact information

### Adult social services

If you care for someone in Northumberland

Onecall: 01670 536 400

Out of hours emergency: 0345 600 52 52

[www.northumberland.gov.uk/sds](http://www.northumberland.gov.uk/sds)

If you care for someone in North Tyneside

Gateway: 0191 643 2777

Out of hours emergency: 0191 200 6800

[www.northtyneside.gov.uk/mycare](http://www.northtyneside.gov.uk/mycare)

### Benefits advice

For full details of individual entitlement or changes due to hospital admission visit [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)

You can also get information from:

- Your local carer service (see below)
- Your local Citizens Advice Bureau

### Carer services

For carers' information in one place, carer support and links with other condition specific organisations.

#### Carers Northumberland Information Service

01670 320025

[www.carersnorthumberland.org.uk](http://www.carersnorthumberland.org.uk)

#### North Tyneside Carers' Centre

0191 643 2298

[www.northtynesidecarers.org.uk](http://www.northtynesidecarers.org.uk)

## Chaplaincy

Our Chaplaincy team is here to provide confidential comfort and support to people of all faiths or none in facing difficult situations such as living with illness, facing bereavement or life pressures. The Chaplain can be contacted through the main hospital switchboard. Our three general hospitals and The Northumbria have chapels for quiet reflection and prayer.

## Learning Disability Liaison Nurse

For advocacy and advice in managing the person's individual needs in the hospital setting.  
0191 293 4035

## Macmillan Support Service

For information about all aspects of living with cancer, a life limiting illness or bereavement.

**Northumberland: 01670 855 533**

**North Tyneside: 0191 293 4377**

## Stroke Information and Support Service

For Information about all aspects of living with stroke 0191 293 4326  
Email: [strokeinfo@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:strokeinfo@nhct.nhs.uk)

## Young Carer information

If you are a young carer or if caring impacts on someone in your family who is under 18, you will find these websites helpful:

[www.northumberlandyoungcarers.org](http://www.northumberlandyoungcarers.org)

[www.northtynesidecarers.org.uk/young-carers/](http://www.northtynesidecarers.org.uk/young-carers/)

[www.youngcarers.net](http://www.youngcarers.net)

[www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)

0344 411 1444

## Alternative Formats

If you would like a copy of this information in large print, another language, audio tape or other format please call the Contact Centre on 03 44 811 8118.

## Other sources of information

### NHS 111

### NHS Choices

[www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/pages/homepage.aspx)

### NICE (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence)

[www.nice.org.uk](http://www.nice.org.uk)

### Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

Freephone: 0800 032 0202

Text: 07815 500015

Email: [northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk](mailto:northoftynepals@nhct.nhs.uk)

### Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust

General Enquiries 03 44 811 8111

[www.northumbria.nhs.uk](http://www.northumbria.nhs.uk)



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