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Ombudsman upholds complaint that hospital failed to arrange care package for patient

A hospital Trust has apologized to a patient who was forced to arrange her own care package after being discharged from hospital.

The complaint

The patient had surgery for a fractured arm following a fall at home. She complained to the Ombudsman that before discharging her staff in the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast should have provided her with an Occupational Therapy or Social Work assessment. She stated that because of their failure, she was left to care for herself over the weekend before independently arranging a package three days after leaving hospital.

The investigation

The Ombudsman's investigation looked at guidance from the Department for Health on discharge planning, the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust's own discharge principles and other relevant professional guidance. It also looked at the patient's medical records and took advice from independent medical advisors.

The patient stated that she had explained to physiotherapy and nursing staff that given her age (67), complex health conditions and the fact that she lived alone at home in a two-storey house, she would have difficulty coping. She further explained that her next of kin was her 72 year old cousin who also suffered from various health conditions.

Independent professional advice provided to the Ombudsman stated that there was no evidence that the patient was involved in the discharge process. This was contrary to the guidance which states that there should be an 'effective person-centred' and 'fully integrated approach' to discharge planning.

According to the advisor, the patient should have been given an assessment from the Occupational Therapist or Social Worker before being allowed home.

In response, the Trust said that if patients raise concerns prior to discharge, the ward nursing team should refer the patient to the relevant service. However, unfortunately in this case this was not done. The Trust stated that it was extremely sorry that the patient's concerns were not followed up.

The outcome

After examining the evidence the Ombudsman concluded that there was a collective failure by the hospital's Multi-Disciplinary Team to appropriately follow up on the patient's concerns about coping at home. As a result she was not given the proper care she needed on leaving the hospital. The complaint was therefore upheld.

Following the recommendations made in the report the Trust apologized to the patient for the errors made in this case, and made a payment to her in acknowledgement of the upset and distress caused.