

Worcestershire Innovation Project

Problem

Over the past six years in Worcestershire, family carers have continuously fed back that their main issue with health and social care support is around when the person they care for is discharged from hospital (Worcestershire Association of Carers). They are often not involved in this process, so don't know what the discharge journey will look like, or what support they might need to put into place at home, causing a lot of stress and anxiety, and increasing the chance of hospital readmission. Carers advised that being identified as a main carer and included in the discharge planning process was the most helpful thing hospital staff could do (Empowering Carers at Hospital Discharge, ICB report, 2022). However, there is no official process for this approach, creating a gap in service.

"One of the things we recognise as a county council is the value of unpaid carers. Without them, our system would be totally on its knees."

Steven Medley, Lead Commissioner at Worcestershire County Council

Innovation

Worcestershire County Council set up a guiding coalition of partners, including local carers organisation Worcestershire Association of Carers (WAC) and technology provider Taking Care, to help find a solution, looking at how to use technology to better support carers through and beyond the hospital discharge process. Their aim was to ensure unpaid carers would feel confident and have the right resources to support their loved ones once they return home from hospital.

"As soon as we knew we were going to get the funding, we grabbed our key partners around the table... This wasn't me in a very traditional lead commissioner role, this was me working with our partners to work out what it is we needed to do... We have to make sure this is sustainable, which is about focusing on the system, and changing what is wrong with the system."

Steven Medley, Lead Commissioner at Worcestershire County Council



Project overview

The Council's coalition of partners also includes carers, integrated care board representatives and hospital staff. WAC is leading the group in this project to embed a more holistic approach to supporting unpaid carers. The approach is being piloted in the stroke unit at a local hospital, selected as often in circumstances relating to a stroke, the caring role can begin unexpectedly and overnight, and also there is often a higher readmission rate from falls after a stroke.

A new position for a Hospital Discharge Carers Adviser has been created, employed by WAC and working directly on the stroke ward with hospital staff to identify new carers, walk through their journey with them, discuss any areas of concern, signpost to relevant services, and introduce technology-enabled care.

"We are working in a multidisciplinary way, identifying carers through the ward and through the team meetings and supporting the carer through that journey, so really empowering them to understand what their caring role is going to look like and have an in-depth understanding of what discharge is going to look like, so they are fully prepared."

Kim Terry, Carer Hospital Discharge Manager, Worcestershire Association of Carers

60 free technology enabled care kits are also being provided to carers as part of this process, which include a lifeline (emergency) button, falls monitor and remote carer-system. This latest technology-enabled care is therefore empowering carers to assist in prevention, helping them feel more confident in their new or adapted role. It allows for close monitoring and increased safety, aiming to avoid readmission.

"Normally tech is implemented when people are home, after the event has happened – when people are at their most stressful... What we are trying to do with the ARF project is pick that up as soon as they have entered hospital, to look at the long-term goals as they go home, what their needs are going to be, and how the tech is going to support the unpaid carer, as well as the service user."

David Fuente, Taking Care (Technology Enabled Care Provider)

As a continuation of this work, stakeholders are building on the new culture of collaboration, working together to develop a bespoke carers dashboard and virtual carers centre. These will identify needs and inform future service development. The first step is a bespoke data collection tool, that has already been designed and developed by WAC, to begin collecting information as part of this project stream.



Key project activity

- Development of a 'what good looks like' model
- Carer journey mapped, iterated and refined with key stakeholders and carer feedback
- New role to support carers embedded into hospital ward, with communications materials distributed to promote
- New carer identification form developed with local Health and Care Trust
- Data collection tool implemented
- Collaboration and support on other local innovation programmes, including the local Primary Care Network and Integrated Stroke Delivery Network

Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) support

SCIE and WAC are meeting regularly to collaborate on various areas of support. A key aspect has been a 'what good looks like' model, for which SCIE supported with gathering feedback from key stakeholders to inform the framework, and taking into account Ipsos evaluation requirements. In addition, SCIE has provided templates for a communications plan to create consistency with communications outputs and key messaging.

WAC have also attended SCIE's 'identifying and supporting unknown carers through hospital admission and discharge' Community of Practice, which has connected them with other projects working on a similar theme to benefit from peer-to-peer learning and shared insights.

Emerging learnings and insights

"It's really difficult to learn how to become a social care expert, a technology-enabled care expert, and a carers expert. When you've got all of those partnerships coming together to collaborate you get a much better outcome."

Mitch Hyde, Taking Care (Technology Enabled Care Provider)



- Collaborating with experts and taking a partnership approach reaches successful outcomes
- Carers' voices and experiences are key at operational and strategic meetings to help inform and shape services and pathways
- Embedding early carer identification and the need for onward support pathways more widely across systems needs to become standard
- Having the presence and profile of carers' support within clinical settings is valuable

Emerging impact

"I've found this very informative, 'cause I didn't know, I thought he just comes home and that's it. So all of this is great! I know there's going to be help out there for us."

Unpaid carer, recently identified via stroke ward

Since the Hospital Discharge Carers Adviser has been in place since 1 February 2025, seven new carers have been identified and six technology enabled care kits have been deployed.

The wider impact of this project for the area overall is improved partnership and collaboration between organisations, leading to a more cohesive system.

"This work is going to leave a legacy of improved connectivity across the system."

Mel Smith, Deputy Chief Executive at Worcestershire Association of Carers

