

## Report for West Berkshire Wheelchair Service

### Findings from a follow-up focus group held at West Berkshire Community Hospital on 19<sup>th</sup> March 2013

#### Those present:

The NHS Berkshire West Wheelchair Service Manager (Professional Lead OT at Royal Berkshire Hospital); a specialist wheelchair OT; 4 wheelchair users; one carer of a wheelchair user; one family support volunteer. The wheelchair users and notes taker were all involved across the wider 'disability' voluntary sector. Those present did not constitute a full cross-section of users. Two sets of notes were taken.

#### Items for discussion:

- Feedback on the wheelchair service
- Information the Wheelchair Service website should include
- Issues, ideas, feedback for other Therapy Services provided at Royal Berkshire Hospital

#### Comments on the existing Service:

The main clinic, at Royal Berkshire Hospital, remains difficult to access, as are several disabled toilet facilities. The RBH Trust had an Access Group at one time but this is thought no longer to be active. (*See recommendation 2*)

Experiences dealing with Hewardines are mixed. In one instance they had the wrong model listed for so when an engineer came out he didn't have the correct part and a further 2 weeks elapsed before the right part was available. However, Hewardines were well organised as regards accurate and timely communications.

Another user has been waiting for 2 bolts for 8 weeks, which is unacceptable for a part that can readily be made in minutes in many engineering workshops. Because of waiting for bolts, the user's new castors and boots are wearing out unnecessarily quickly because they now catch on wheels and plates.

Every year the Wheelchair Service tries to contact everyone it has not heard from, to make sure they have up to date information and their wheelchair is in use and safe working order. They used to have many suppliers but are now down to 3, which makes for a longer supply chain, accentuating problems when repairs are needed. (*See recommendation 3*)

#### What would be useful for the website?

Two present had purchased their own wheelchairs and indicated uncertainty as to what would qualify them for an NHS assessment or an NHS chair. For someone to be assessed, a Health Care Professional needs to make the referral and a

wheelchair should be provided if someone cannot get around indoors easily. It would be useful to explain the referrals process on the Wheelchair Service web site.

New service users living in cross-boundary areas are particularly likely to need information and guidance on how to access the local Wheelchair Service, particularly those living in parts of North Hampshire and South Oxfordshire. The guiding rule is that if someone has a Berkshire West GP they come under the West Berkshire Wheelchair Service, irrespective of postcode, useful to include in the web site.

If a wheelchair needs repairs away from home and the cost is under £100, the local wheelchair service will pay. More than that, then the West Berkshire Service will pay. This would be useful to include in the web site.

One service user suggested that all wheelchair users should have a list of wheelchair clinics throughout the country in case they have problems when away from home. The Service Manger agreed to put a link with the information on the website.

Whenever a wheelchair client moves away permanently out of area, they can take their wheelchair with them. They should then inform the West Berkshire Wheelchair Service so that records are transferred to the service covering the area to where the service user has moved. This would be useful to include in the web site.

Also suggested:

- Information on eligibility criteria
- Information about cross-border matters
- List of what wheelchairs are available through the clinic
- Details of sports clubs for wheelchair users.
- List of all wheelchair service contact details in the country
- How to find someone to take part in the NY Marathon for whom there is a grant of £480 available
- Information about ENRYCH, a charity that helps disabled adults with sporting and leisure activities, reduce social isolation and build self-esteem.
- Information about other relevant voluntary support groups
- Information about the entitlement to a voucher of £1,500 every 5 years for repairs to wheelchairs that are not automatically repaired free by the Wheelchair Clinic.
- Information about holidays for wheelchair users, in particular, the website 'I need a holiday too' about holidays in Brittany.
- 'It is a better deal to contact Plymouth for a rail users card where wheelchair users can get 50% off rather than 1/3 if applied for locally
- The possibility of giving feedback on the website

### **Feedback on therapies available at Royal Berkshire Hospital:**

One person complained that hydrotherapy had been recommended to alleviate the symptoms of his ataxia but no one will fund him because of the rarity of his condition. If he had PD or MS he would be funded by their associated charities. Discussion about the relative benefits of hydrotherapy followed – it is particularly good for

maintaining health and well-being. Attempts are being made to improve the availability of the pool at RBH, but capacity will remain insufficient.

One person has found that when physiotherapy is recommended for someone in hospital, there are not enough staff for hoisting and this is sometimes used as an excuse for physiotherapy not happening. (*See recommendation 5*)

#### **Other matters:**

Concern was expressed about what would happen to the Service after the new Health changes come into force on 1<sup>st</sup> April, with many directional matters still unclear. The Thames Valley Specialist Commissioning Board will probably have the remit for the Wheelchair and neuro-rehab Services. The voluntary sector has been invited to provide a Patient/Carer representative on the CCG Long Term Conditions Board, a useful opportunity to air concerns about low profile services such as the Wheelchair Service, which is important noting that 1 in 6 people have a long-term neurological condition and 1 in 5 hospital beds are occupied by patients with neurological conditions, meaning that the Wheelchair Service's 4,000 clients have a diversity of needs, including the need for a voice at times of reorganisation and budget pressures. (*See recommendation 6*)

Raising awareness among clinicians of what the voluntary sector does would be useful. (*See recommendation 4*)

#### **Recommended actions:**

1. The web site recommendations are listed above and several focus group attendees will be keen to continue to provide input as needed.
2. It would be helpful to check if the RBH Access Group is active and if so to raise issues of access to the wheelchair clinic and to disabled toilet facilities at RBH.
3. To ensure there are prompt repairs for wheelchairs having a common weakness or fault there should be a policy and a suitable stock of spare parts to replace those that may habitually fail. The Wheelchair Service should consider including into all contracts with suppliers that a list of recommended spares be agreed, with an appropriate stock system in place to ensure prompt availability to cover likely requirements
4. It was agreed generally that representatives of Enrych, the Independent Living Network and the Disability Alliance should brief the Royal Berkshire Hospital Neuro-Rehab staff about their charities, all enabled by the Wheelchair Service Manager.
5. If relatives of hospitalised wheelchair users were allowed to be more involved, this could enable more planned physiotherapy to take place in a hospital setting.
6. We should all strive to work together to ensure that Wheelchair Services remains clearly in the minds of Commissioners at these difficult times.

## Notes on the existing service:

The Berkshire West Wheelchair Service covers Berkshire from Bracknell to Lambourn and into some neighbouring areas. The Service holds regular clinics at Royal Berkshire Hospital, Beecher Hall, the MS Centre in Reading and at WBCH Thatcham. A new clinic in Bracknell offers excellent access for wheelchair users in the East of Berkshire West.

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*West Berkshire Neurological Alliance*

Representing all people in Berkshire West affected by a neurological condition  
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