



Hospital Discharges During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Survey Report

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August - December 2020

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About Healthwatch



Healthwatch Shropshire and Healthwatch Telford & Wrekin are the independent health and social care champions for local people

We work to make your voice count when it comes to shaping and improving services. We use a variety of methods to find out what people like about services, and what could be improved and we share these views with those with the power to make change happen. Our reports go to:

- the organisations who provide services
- the commissioners who pay for services (e.g. Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Clinical Commissioning Group, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin Councils)
- service regulators (the Care Quality Commission, NHS England)
- our national body Healthwatch England to let them know how local services are working.



We are not experts in health and social care and surveys are just one of the methods we use to put a spotlight on services and ask people to share their views with us. Usually our surveys are publicised and promoted through our engagement activities (e.g. talks and stands at events) as well as through online publicity and local press releases. Due to the pandemic we were unable to use face to face engagement for this topic.

Please note

Our survey was time limited but we continue to want to hear from people who are willing to share their experiences with us and we will share them with the providers, commissioners and regulators. (See page 6)

The context

In early March 2020 Healthwatch England shared with all local Healthwatch that there was new national guidance around hospital discharge during the Covid-19 pandemic. The NHS urgently needed to free up capacity in hospitals to cope with a predicted surge in demand from COVID-19 patients.

The new hospital discharge process was introduced nationally. It focused on getting people out of hospital quickly, to free up 15,000 beds across the country and support the faster movement of patients in and out of hospital. People leaving hospital who may need out-of-hospital support to recover would now have their ongoing support needs assessed after they were discharged (usually in their own home), rather than in hospital.

The 'Discharge to Assess' model places a new responsibility on acute hospital teams to work closely with community health and social care services to ensure people get the support they need after leaving hospital.

All health and social care systems were expected to set up a new discharge service operating seven days a week to ensure that people get the ongoing care they need. In Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin an Integrated Discharge Hub was created to enable staff from Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital Trust (SaTH), Shropshire Community Health Trust (SCHAT), which provides the county's community hospitals, and both Local Authorities to work together to speed up and improve the discharge process. SaTH told Healthwatch Shropshire in August 2020 that:

'This facility has meant all parties involved in a patient discharge are collated in one facility to improve swiftness of process and Multi-Disciplinary Team discussions in a real time manner preventing unnecessary delays and improved communication.'

In August 2020, the hospital discharge guidance was updated into a national policy, which confirmed that discharge to assess would continue for the foreseeable future and made it mandatory for local systems to embed the new ways of working developed in response to the March guidance. This led to Healthwatch England launching a national survey to help identify what had worked so far and what could be improved. Their report was published in October 2020.



In September 2020 Healthwatch Shropshire published a report about 'Home Care in Shropshire'. The domiciliary care providers we spoke to between October and December 2019 had told us that they had experienced some difficulties with hospital discharge. For example, they told us that sometimes 'people come out of hospital and they are not ready. They need more care or they shouldn't be at home.'

One of the key findings of this report was that hospital discharges can pose problems for care providers due to a lack of communication, mixed messages or failed discharges.

In their response to the report in August 2020 Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital Trust told us that, as well as being part of the Integrated Discharge Hub, they had been working to improve the patient experience of discharge through a number of other initiatives, including:

- [Employing] more Patient Journey Facilitators to:
 - Support in overseeing the patient journey through their stay in hospital and the subsequent discharge
 - Enable a point of contact for all parties to ensure a better line of communication between all involved especially the patient
- Enhanced discharge summaries to improve communication between the Trust and Primary Care
- Patient pathways developed to provide specialised rehabilitation in community hospitals.

Few people in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin responded to the Healthwatch England Survey so Healthwatch Shropshire and Healthwatch Telford & Wrekin decided to work with the organisations involved in the Integrated Discharge Hub to create a survey that would be relevant locally and help them to evaluate the service. We also hoped to hear about the added impact of the other initiatives SaTH had put in place.

What we did

Healthwatch Shropshire and Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin met with staff from the organisations involved in delivering the Integrated Discharge Hub to adapt the national survey used by Healthwatch England to ensure the questions were relevant locally (Appendix B). It was agreed that Healthwatch will share the full comments we receive with the providers.

We also agreed to open the survey to all patients discharged from hospital, not just to patients who were discharged under the new guidance into supported care pathways. We agreed to do this so that we could listen to the views of other patients who had been discharged from hospital.

The survey was hosted on Healthwatch Shropshire's website and a link to this was added to the Healthwatch Telford and Wrekin website.

The survey was open from August 2020 until the end of December 2020. We promoted the survey through a joint press release, through our own social media channels and through partner organisations.

We shared our interim findings from our survey with health and social care partners in November 2020.

Since the completion of the survey, the Urgent Care Director for Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Clinical Commissioning Group (STWCCG) and System Senior Responsible Officer for Discharge has explained to us:

- The Covid 19 discharge requirements required a testing and isolation programme for all patients in supported care pathways, which has been updated as the guidance has been updated.

- Clinicians in the hospital and in the community have continuously updated the one page Covid 19 Clinical Pathway for supported care pathways as a result.
- The requirements for testing and isolation for supported care pathways are not necessarily the same for patients discharged on other pathways.
- To avoid unnecessary admissions into the acute hospital during the Covid 19 pandemic some pathways involve patients being transferred directly from the Accident and Emergency Department to the community hospitals, or home into a supported pathway. These patients will not have been 'discharged' following the COVID-19 discharge requirements as they were not actually admitted to the hospital.



**Have
your
say**

While this survey is now closed, if you have an experience of leaving hospital during COVID-19 that you would like to share with Healthwatch please go to our websites at:

[Share your views | Healthwatch Shropshire](#) Or see the Contact details on page 28 of this report.

[Share your views | Healthwatch Telfordandwrekin](#)

Key Findings

- We heard from a total of 50 people, including patients, carers, friends or relatives and paid care workers. 31 lived in Shropshire, 18 lived in Telford & Wrekin and one lived in Powys. We did not identify any issues specific to where someone lived.
- In total we were told 16% of patients (8) had received information on the changes to discharge processes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. 68% (34 patients) did not receive this information and 16% (8 people) weren't sure whether they or the patient had been given this information.

- 74% of people (37) were tested for COVID-19 whilst in hospital, 72% of those (27) received their results prior to being discharged. 19% of those tested (7 people) didn't receive their results before being discharged, one of whom was discharged to a care home.
- 24% of respondents (12 people made up of 4 patient responses and 8 carer/relative responses) said that they/the patient had *not* been prepared to leave hospital when they were discharged. Comments reported a lack of equipment, worry about support at home and two failed discharges (patient readmitted within 24 hours of leaving hospital).
- In total 24% of people (12) waited more than 24 hours to be discharged after being told they were well enough to leave. 48% of people (24) waited between 2 and 24 hours. 8% (4 people) waited for less than an hour before being discharged.
- We were told that 32% of patients (16) had no conversation about support from health or social care after leaving hospital prior to being discharged. 16% (8 people) were told they wouldn't need support. 26% of patients (13) did have a conversation about support before leaving hospital.
- In total 42% of patients (21) were given information about who to contact if they needed further advice or support after leaving hospital. 42% of people (21) were not given this information.
- We were told that 76% of patients (38) did not receive a visit from a health professional to assess their needs after leaving hospital. 8% or 4 patients said they did receive a visit from a health professional after leaving hospital to assess their needs. 4 carers or relatives said that the person they cared for had received a visit.
- 16% of people (8) told us that they had support needs which they weren't currently receiving any help with, 6 of those people had not had a visit after being discharged from hospital.
- Patients and carers or relatives told us about good care they had received from staff whilst in hospital and about being made to feel safe.
- Both patients and carers or relatives told us that they felt that aftercare could have been better.

- Carers and relatives told us that communication around discharge and after care could have been improved.
- No-one specifically told us about the Patient Journey Facilitators employed by SaTH, the enhanced discharge summaries or the provision of specialised rehabilitation in community hospitals in their response to this survey so we cannot comment on how effective these have been.

What people told us

This report summarises the experiences of 50 people who completed our survey. This is made up of 28 patients, 16 unpaid carers, friends or relatives of someone who was discharged from hospital and 6 paid care workers of patients who were discharged.

31 patients who completed the survey, or had the survey completed about them, live in the Shropshire area, 18 live in Telford & Wrekin and one person lives in Powys. When examining the responses we did not identify any issues specific to where someone lived and so have reported on them as a whole.

People shared their experiences of hospital discharges from six different named hospitals in Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin:

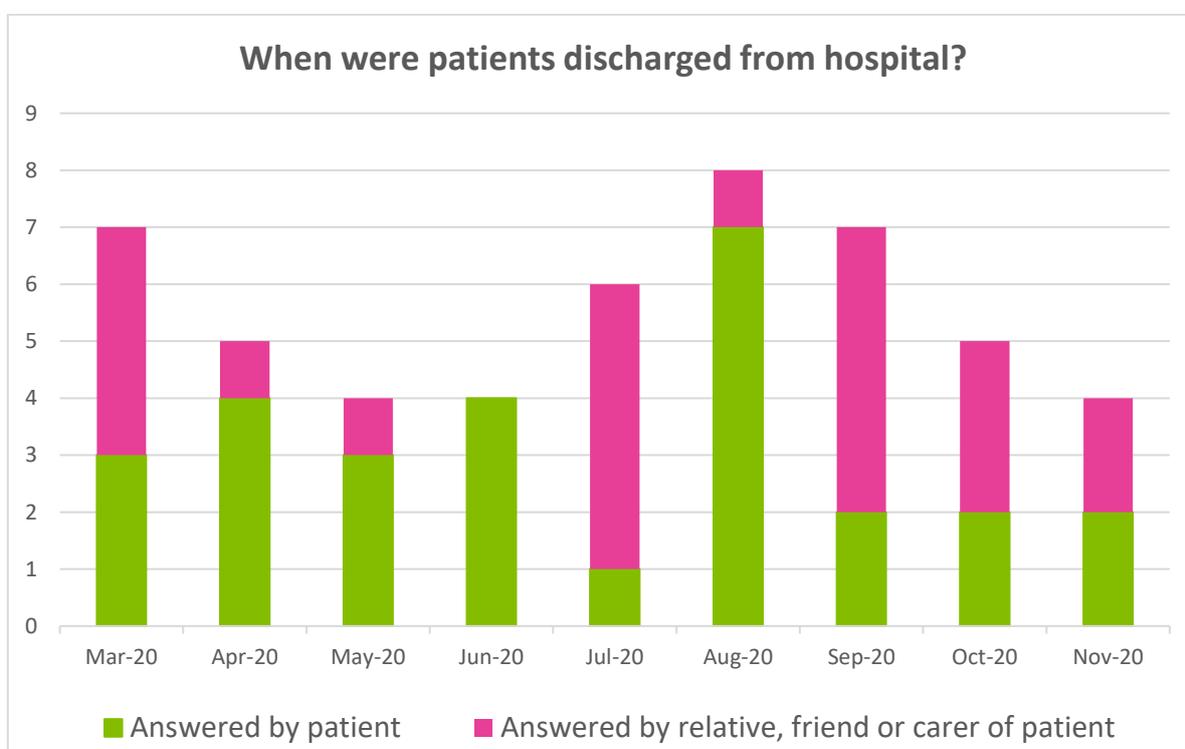
Name of Hospital	Patients	Carers	Total
Bishops Castle Community Hospital	1	0	1
Princess Royal Hospital	9	10	19
Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital	2	0	2
Royal Shrewsbury Hospital	11	9	20
The Redwoods	1	0	1
Whitchurch Community Hospital	0	2	2
Other	4	1	5

To note: The Covid 19 Discharge Requirements apply to patients who are discharged from Acute Hospitals (for our area this is the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital and the Princess Royal Hospital, and the main wards of Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital -RJAH), into supported pathways (either into a bedded environment or supported at home). Bishops Castle, Whitchurch Hospital and the

RJAH Sheldon Ward are Community Hospital beds and classed as supported pathway 2 discharge pathway beds, where assessment out of hospital takes place.

Of the five people who chose ‘Other’, two patients had been discharged from the Shrewsbury Nuffield Hospital, two patients had been discharged from Royal Stoke Hospital and one person was unsure if their relative had been discharged from Royal Shrewsbury Hospital or Princess Royal Hospital.

We heard from patients and carers or relatives about hospital discharges taking place throughout the period of March 2020 - November 2020.



Most patients were discharged during the week and during the day.

Overall we were told that 37 patients (74%) were discharged between Monday and Thursday. Nine (18%) were discharged at the weekend (Friday, Saturday or Sunday).

In total 41 patients (82%) were discharged during the day (8am -8pm). Five patients (10%) were discharged at night (8pm - 8am), of these four patients (8%)

had waited over 24 hours to be discharged. One of the patients discharged at night was not asked if they needed support with transport.

Sample comment from a patient discharged at night:

‘The evening dragged on with no sign of an ambulance and, at around 11pm I woke up to hear people speaking outside the ward, saying that I was going to Bishop’s Castle that night. No-one had told me what was happening, and I was not given any information after their conversation had finished. After a short while I buzzed for the nurse and said that I was not happy to be discharged so late at night, and that I should have been kept informed of their intentions. Sometime later the ambulance arrived - both of the ambulance staff were very kind and cheerful. We set off, and I arrived at Bishop’s Castle at approximately 2.30 am.’ - *Patient discharged from Royal Shrewsbury Hospital in April 2020*

Most people were not given information about changes

Guidance issued by the Government in March 2020¹ states that all patients should be discharged as soon as it is clinically safe to do so. All NHS Trusts, community health services and social care providers have been required to adhere to this guidance since 20th March 2020. The guidance also states that information about the new hospital discharge process should be shared with all patients when they are admitted to hospital.²

34 people, 68% of respondents, told us they did not receive information explaining that the process of leaving hospital had changed due to COVID-19. Eight people (16% of respondents) told us that they were given this information; five of these patients were at Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, one was at Whitchurch Community Hospital.



¹ [Hospital discharge service guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hospital-discharge-leaflet-for-patients-when-they-enter-hospital)

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hospital-discharge-leaflet-for-patients-when-they-enter-hospital>

Most people felt ready to leave hospital when they were discharged.



24 patients (86%) told us that ‘yes’ they felt ready to leave hospital; 13 (46%) said they were ‘definitely ready’ and 11 (39%) were ready ‘to some extent’. Ten (63%) relatives, friends and carers told us that the patients they knew had been ready to leave hospital; five ‘definitely’ and five to ‘some extent’.

Sample comments from patients who felt ready to leave hospital:

- ‘Myself was prepared but still had to wait several hours for the doctors to sign me out! Very few available’ - *Patient discharged from Royal Shrewsbury Hospital August 2020*
- ‘I felt that I was well enough to be discharged and I was given information relevant to my condition.’ - *Patient discharged from Royal Shrewsbury Hospital June 2020*
- ‘Knew what I needed to do re-medication and I wanted to get home.’ - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital November 2020*
- ‘I was uncertain how I would cope at home as I couldn’t walk properly. However, care had been arranged for me for which I was very grateful.’ - *Patient discharged from Royal Shrewsbury Hospital September 2020*

Some patients wanted to leave hospital for reasons other than being medically fit with several people telling us about the stress they felt being in hospital during the pandemic:

- 'Being in hospital was causing me a lot of stress and I just wanted to go home.' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, September 2020*
- 'I had to stay in hospital for 9 days following birth of my baby as she was unwell. We were not allowed any visitors and I was unable to see my 5yr old and my husband was with him and couldn't visit his new-born baby. It was an extremely tough time! To be a new mum and be separated from my first child to be with the baby was heartbreaking! I felt national guidance had not considered the support patients need which only their family can provide. To sit in a room looking at four walls for 9 days with a sick baby following a c-section was a difficult time and very lonely! Better arrangements need to be in place and consideration to patients and families that need support but are given none.' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, June 2020*
- 'Desperate to leave, but not really ready mentally.' - *Patient discharged from Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital, August 2020*
- 'Worried about being there. Didn't want to stay any longer than necessary. Head injury, checked over by a doctor, allowed to leave.' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, June 2020*

Sample comments from carers and relatives of people who felt ready to leave hospital:

- 'Lady was not aware of why she was being kept in hospital she was admitted after a collapse while attending a clinic in PRH. As far as she was aware she was waiting for a cardiologist to review her ECG then she would be discharged she was told this 3 days in a row so was more than ready for her return home' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, October 2020*

- ‘My husband felt physically well enough to leave hospital but we had very little information of how to proceed after discharge. The information we did receive did not fully cover all we needed to know to feel safe and comfortable. dressings were only partly discussed and were vague, when we read the discharge notes it left us with no idea of how long to keep the dressings on for and with 4 wounds we only received 3 dressings and had to improvise with regular plasters for the 4th wound.’ - *Patient discharged from Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, October 2020*

Four patients told us that ‘no’, they had not felt ready to leave hospital when they were discharged. Eight carers, relatives or friends told us that the patient they were caring for had not felt ready to leave hospital.

Sample comment from a patient who didn’t feel ready to leave hospital:

- ‘I had had major surgery 3 days before and still felt very unwell and unable to cope myself. I was also worried that my husband would not be able to look after me properly.’ - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, April 2020*

Sample comments from carers of patients who did not feel ready to leave hospital:

- ‘They were unable to walk unaided, get in and out of bed unaided and wash themselves unaided. But we’re told they were ready to go home! This particular patient is unable to make decisions on their own and reason about their safety at home and the nursing staff, OT’s and physio were adamant that this patient was “better off at home”. There was no consideration given to how the family would cope with this persons needs. If this patients discharge was discussed with him he, unfortunately, would not understand what the implications were and how he was to cope.’ - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, September 2020*

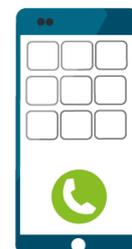
- 'They were not medically fit to be discharged. They were still extremely unsteady and very confused which was not their normal. Also they got sent home left there which resulted in a nasty fall and re-admission on the same day.' - *Patient discharged from Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, October 2020*

Visiting restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic have meant that family and friends have not been able to see their loved ones whilst in hospital. Two relatives of patients said that they did not know if their relatives had felt ready to leave hospital commenting on being unable to visit or speak to them:

- 'My father had Dementia and we were not able to speak with him so we have no idea how he felt at this point. We were surprised that he had such a long wait. He was ready to leave mid morning (that is what the discharge team told us) and he arrived at the nursing home approx 5.30pm. My worry was that he had been given food and drink during this long wait.' - *Patient discharged from Whitchurch Community Hospital, May 2020*
- 'My father-in-law was unable to communicate his needs due to Vascular Dementia. Family and care staff were not allowed to be with him during the initial lockdown.' *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, April 2020*

Some people were given contact details for further support and some weren't.

21 patients (42%) were given information about who to contact if they needed further health advice or support after leaving hospital. The same number, 21 patients (42%), were *not* provided with this information. One patient said they had not wanted it and six people (12%) said they did not know if this information had been provided.



Of the people who were not given this information, four (19%) reported having ongoing support needs which were not currently being met.

Sample comments from carers or relatives of someone with ongoing support needs:

- ‘Admitted to hospital following issues with incontinence and falls. Was not discharged with a plan for incontinence or any pads. District nurse have not yet attended 3 days after discharge. Referral not made by hospital although care package was put in place.’ - *Patient discharged from Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, September 2020*
- ‘Pain management. Everyone seems busy and hasn’t the time.’ - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, November 2020*

Few people were visited and assessed for ongoing health and care needs after discharge

In total seven patients (14%) received a discharge assessment at home after leaving hospital. Thirty eight people (76%) did not receive a visit and five people (10%) were not sure if this had happened or not.

We asked if patients had any ongoing support needs for which they didn’t have any help at the time of completing the survey. In total eight people (16%) said ‘yes’, 38 (76%) said ‘no’ and four people (8%) ‘didn’t know’.

Of the eight people who had support needs which they weren’t getting help with six of them had not had a visit after being discharged from hospital.

Sample comments about ongoing support needs:

- ‘Still needs a primary assessment for physiotherapy needs, mobility problems and occupational therapy.’ - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital or Royal Shrewsbury Hospital in March 2020*
- ‘My mum is my Dads full time carer and she is confused herself. She was given a phone number but she doesn’t remember this and doesn’t know where it is.’ - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, November 2020*
- ‘I am exhausted all of the time (have pulmonary hypertension and still waiting to see consultant at Sheffield hospital about this) plus severe inflammatory arthritis. Husband is nearly 80 and we are finding life very difficult.’ - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, July 2020*
- ‘I need help to care for my husband.’ - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, November 2020*

There were mixed experiences of communication with carers or relatives

Twelve out of 22 respondents (55%) felt that they were not sufficiently involved and informed in decision making about their friend, relative or client's discharge from hospital. Three people felt that they were 'definitely' involved and informed enough and six people felt they were involved and informed about the person's discharge from hospital 'to some extent'.

Similarly, 12 out of 22 respondents (55%) told us that they felt that their own caring responsibilities had *not* been considered in the decision making about their friend, relative or client's care and support after leaving hospital and that they should have been. Two people felt this was 'definitely' considered and two people felt it was considered 'to some extent'. Two people said that this was not considered but didn't need to be as they were a paid care worker and four people didn't know if they felt their needs had been considered.

Relatives had mixed experiences of communication. Sample comments:

- 'Because my Father had dementia and did not have capacity we had a high level of contact with the professionals in the hospital over his discharge. He was spoken to about things but did not understand and all the decision making was through his family.' - *Patient discharged from Whitchurch Community Hospital, May 2020*
- 'Hospital liaison nurse for learning disability was excellent.' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, July 2020*
- 'If medical staff had a hand over with the carer then these issues and mistakes could be avoided. We care for my mother round the clock, yet no one is willing to have any discussion on her care hence on discharge she comes out with more problems than when she went in. Regardless most staff are very kind, but surely this is about good nursing care, I believe that carers information is a benefit and if available they should be given the opportunity to support.' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, November 2020*
- 'The first day mum was in hospital a nurse phoned me twice from A&E to tell me what was happening. They let me know she went to the ward. From then on the only contact I had was with my mum who is forgetful and not a reliable source of information.' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, November 2020*

- ‘It would have been helpful to have a list of the main staff involved with dad. Because we never met anyone, just voices on the end of the phone, it was very hard to piece together the who had said what. We particularly had a struggle liaising with the social worker, everything we ended up speaking to 2 or 3 people before managing to get through.’ - *Patient discharged from Whitchurch Community Hospital, May 2020*



In Healthwatch Shropshire’s report ‘Home Care in Shropshire’ (September 2020)³, it was reported that domiciliary care providers said there were problems with poor communication and lack of continuity around hospital discharges. Healthwatch Shropshire heard that the person who is requesting care for a person may never have met them and it can be hard to speak to anybody who has knowledge of the patient.

In this survey we received comments from paid carers on the same themes:

- ‘Communication. When they were due to come home - we got told so many different days and times and when they did discharge this customer they were sent home with no care as the hospital hadn’t informed us of them being discharged. The customer then had a nasty fall and had to go back into hospital hours after being sent home.’ - *Patient discharged from Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, October 2020*
- ‘Communication from the hospital if they had told us the full extent to the customer’s difficulties we could have explained this was not their normal and they didn’t sound safe to be at home.’ - *Patient discharged from Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, October 2020*

³ [Home Care in Shropshire | Healthwatch Shropshire](#)

- ‘They were unable to walk unaided, get in and out of bed unaided and wash themselves unaided. But we’re told they were ready to go home! This particular patient is unable to make decisions on their own and reason about their safety at home and the nursing staff, OT’s and physio were adamant that this patient was “better off at home”. There was no consideration given to how the family would cope with this persons needs. If this patients discharge was discussed with him he, unfortunately, would not understand what the implications were and how he was to cope.’ - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, September 2020*

Most patients were discharged to their preferred location.



A fifth of respondents (20%) told us that *no* discussion took place between staff and the patient about where they were going to be discharged to. Nine went to their own homes and one was transferred to another hospital.

Thirty four people (68%) did have this discussion and were then discharged to their preferred place. For 27 (54%) of these patients that place was their own home, five (10%) were discharged to a care home or nursing home which was their preferred place and one was discharged to temporary accommodation.

Sample comment:

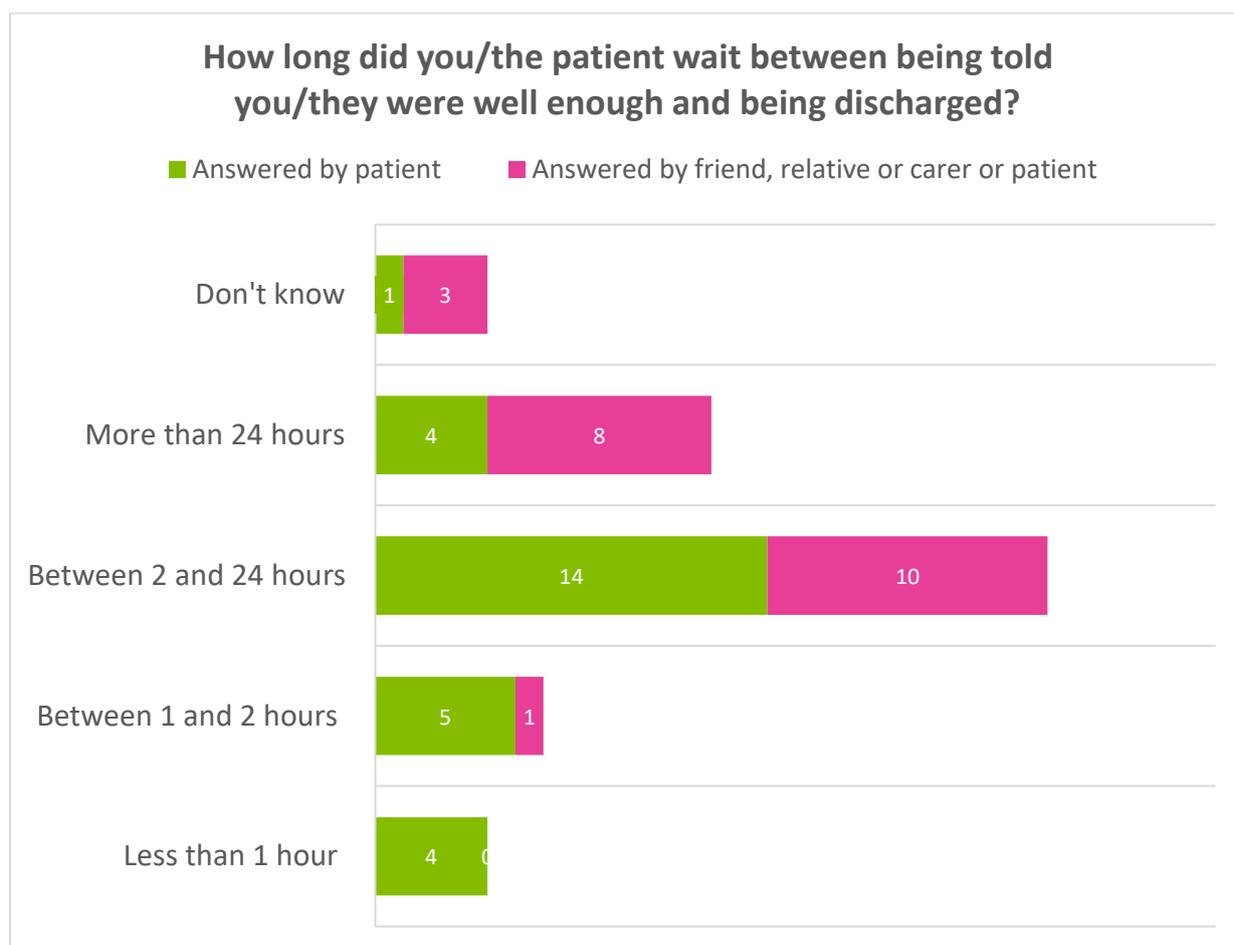
- ‘I was brought in via A&E, then moved to a small (2 bed) ward to be transferred on. I was told I would be going to Whitchurch community hospital, then this was cancelled as they no longer had a bed available. I remained in this ward overnight and all the next day. In the early evening of day two I was advised that I would be going to Bishop's Castle. This is quite a way from my home in Ellesmere, but since hospital visiting was banned at the time I thought that would be ok.’ - *Patient discharged from Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, April 2020*

Some patients were discharged without being spoken to about support.

Of the 39 people who were discharged to their own homes, eight (21%) were told they would not need support and 13 (34%) were *not* spoken to about support. Four of these people report having unmet needs, two of whom have unmet needs in relation to caring for another person.

Most patients were not discharged within two hours.

The guidance issued in March 2020 and updated in August 2020⁴ required all patients to be discharged within two hours of being told they were medically fit to leave hospital. However, we found only a fifth of patients (10 people) were discharged within this timeframe.



⁴ Hospital Discharge Government Guidance (August 2020): <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hospital-discharge-service-guidance>

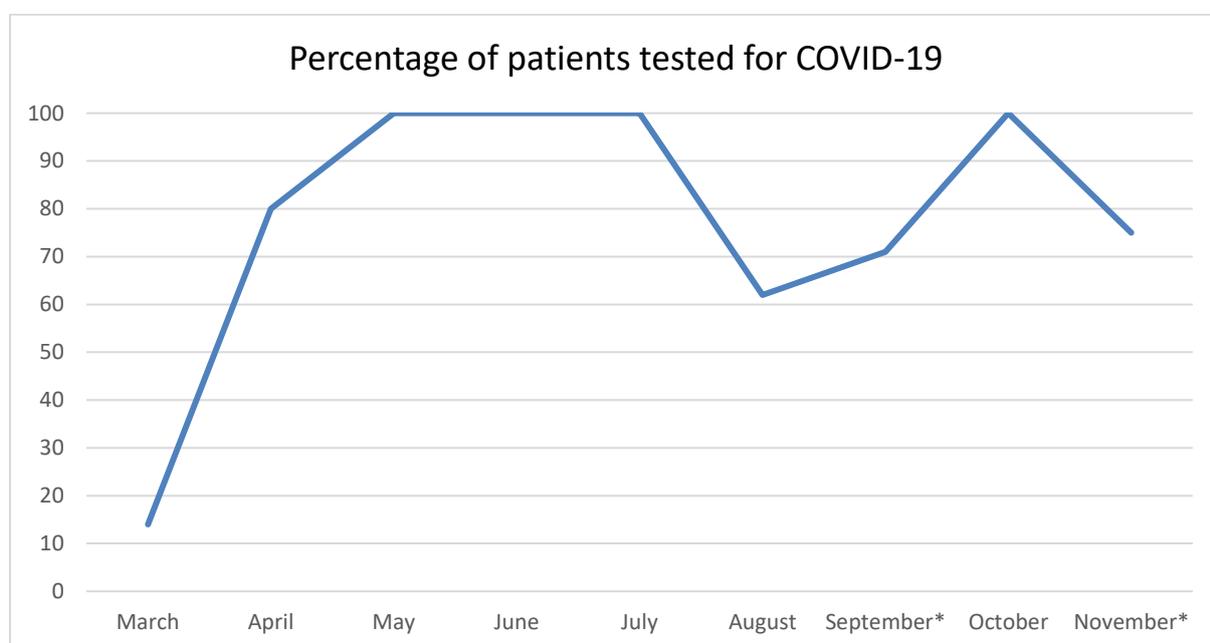
In total 24 patients (48%) waited between 2 and 24 hours between being told they were well enough and being discharged. Twelve patients (24%) waited more than 24 hours. People told us that they had to wait for medications or for Doctors to be able to sign them out.

Sample comments:

- 'I had to wait about three hours for the medication I needed to be discharged and leave. I waited so long that I had to have a meal on the ward.' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, November 2020*
- 'It is torture knowing you can go home but have to wait what seems to be a lifetime to get the go ahead from Doctors. There is not enough of them especially at weekends. It isn't care it's cruelty!' - *Patient discharged from Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, August 2020*
- 'We were surprised that he had such a long wait. He was ready to leave mid-morning (that is what the discharge team told us) and he arrived at the nursing home approx 5.30pm. My worry was that had he been given food and drink during this long wait.' - *Patient discharged from Whitchurch Community Hospital, May 2020*
- 'Mum was told in the morning that she was fit to be discharged by her consultant. However, she then had to wait for a long time for the pharmacy to bring her drugs to her. She was sat in a chair by the bed just waiting for these tablets and when they arrived they had missed some off, however we confirmed that we already had some of these tablets at home and she was allowed to go.' - *Patient discharged from Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, July 2020*

COVID-19 Testing

In total 37 patients out of 50 (74%) were tested for COVID-19 whilst in hospital. Ten people (20%) were not tested and three people said they didn't know if this had happened. The hospital discharge guidance released on 19 March had no requirement to test people for COVID-19 before they were discharged, although the guidance suggested that if patients had been tested, their test results were to be included in documentation that accompanied the person when they left hospital.



**Please note figures for September and November included patients whose family or carers didn't know if they had been tested so the percentage could actually be higher in those months.*

In March 71% of patients in our survey were *not* tested for COVID-19. By April 80% of patients told us they *had* been tested for COVID-19. For May, June and July 100% of patients were tested. There was a dip in testing in August, down to 62%, and this dip in testing rates in August was also reflected in the results of the Healthwatch England national survey.

Of the 37 people tested, 27 people's COVID-19 swab test results were known prior to them being discharged (73%), seven people's results were not known prior to them being discharged (19%) and three people did not know.

One of the people discharged without knowing their COVID-19 test result was discharged to a nursing or care home, leaving hospital in April 2020. Two other patients were discharged to stay with friends or family without their test results being known.

Sample comments from patients:

- 'Although I was tested when I was admitted into hospital I was extremely surprised that I wasn't tested when I was discharged, especially as I work with older adults in a retirement housing development.' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, October 2020*
- 'I didn't get tested for COVID-19, on arrival or when I left hospital.' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, October 2020*

Sample comments about COVID-19 tests from paid carers:

- 'No details were given regarding COVID-19. When the hospital staff were asked about testing for COVID they stated that they would not be testing my patient for COVID-19. Due to the amount of admissions we had at the time, we feel that had COVID-19 Testing been done before discharge this would of reduced the amount of patients and staff affected by the virus.' - *Patient discharged from Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, March 2020*

- 'More information to the family about discharge and he shouldn't have been discharged back to the nursing home without the results of the Coronavirus swab test, which were received the day after and were positive. He was readmitted that day, discharged the next day and died at the nursing home that night (22-4-20). It would have been good to have had the opportunity to be with him on discharge.' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, April 2020*

What went well?

We asked patients what they felt went well with their hospital discharge. Several patients told us they were made to feel safe. This may have been particularly important to people during a pandemic.

- 'I told staff my lift was outside and a nurse walked me to the exit and helped me to find the car. She made sure I was safe.' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, November 2020*
- 'Very kind and informative I felt safe.' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, October 2020*
- 'Everything! It was excellent and I felt very safe.' - *Patient discharged from Nuffield Health Shrewsbury Hospital, April 2020*

Patients also told us positive things about the care they received from staff during their stay in hospital:

- 'It went well I was treated very well' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, May 2020*
- 'The nursing staff were cheerful, friendly and encouraging.' - *Patient discharged from Nuffield Health Shrewsbury Hospital, April 2020*
- 'The hospital were very helpful in giving information. Support from the rehabilitation team at the hospital has been excellent (by phone).' - *Patient discharged from Royal Stoke University Hospital, August 2020*
- 'Midwives were amazing!' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, June 2020*
- 'I was in for major spinal surgery and I could not have wished for better care. All information on what happened, dressings, drugs was all in writing for me, for the GP, and the outpatient clinic so there was no doubt about anything. Outstanding in patient and discharge.' - *Patient discharged from Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital, August 2020*

Carers or relatives also mentioned staff who were helpful:

- 'A referral to social care by the paramedics led to contact being made with family members fairly quickly, to discuss potential arrangements. The hospital were good at communicating information about my relative's condition and discharge, when a family member rang them. We never got the impression they were too busy or that we were being rushed off the phone.' - *Patient discharged from Whitchurch Community Hospital, March 2020*
- 'Hospital liaison nurse for learning disability was excellent.' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, July 2020*
- 'When nurses and doctors contacted were very helpful and sympathetic however this was too infrequent and what they said would happen didn't.' - *Patient discharged from Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, September 2020*

What could have been better?

We asked patients what could have been better about their experience. Several people felt that after-care or follow up could have been improved:

- 'I was not prepared for the intensity of pain I suffered from several days, which happened about a week after discharge. I feel that I was poorly prepared for post-operative difficulties; no-one mentioned nerve damage or that the after effects of lymph node removal could be extreme painful or that the effects could be long-lasting. I have since learned that these are common after effects, not the rare occasions I have been told since I reported them.' - *Patient discharged from Nuffield Health Shrewsbury Hospital, August 2020*
- 'Ambulance staff = satisfactory - aftercare sadly lacking' - *Patient discharged from Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital, August 2020*

Two patients who had not had a discussion around support after discharge and had not received a visit after leaving hospital felt that these discussions would have been useful:

- 'I could have been asked how I was going to manage at home especially as I was shielding since March due to coronavirus. Husband gets confused sometimes so very difficult for me to cope.' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, July 2020*
- 'More support / discussion regarding how I was going to manage after my discharge.' *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, April 2020*

Two patients mentioned that the attitude of staff could have been better:

- 'I think my transfer could have been better. I do, of course, realise that this was during the height of COVID-19, and that NHS resources were at breaking point. But the nurse in charge was very uncaring and abrupt, and two other people in the holding bay were (in my opinion) subjected to unnecessary bullying.' - *Patient discharged from Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, April 2020*
- 'I found some younger members of staff quite patronising to older patients. Speaking loudly and slowly assuming some sort of cognitive impairment follows once one is in receipt of a pension?' - *Patient discharged from Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, September 2020*

Carers and relatives felt that communication needed to be improved:

- 'Apart from the good surgery everything else needed to be better from being prepared what was to come. The fact there were four areas of cancer and 4/5 inches of chin had to be cut out. Even a telephone consultation would have sufficed. Not acceptable to spend half a day plus trying to get answers re bleeding from chin and ear. My husband is 87 with prostate cancer as well so unfortunately not impressed at all with any of this care and it can't all be put down to Covid.' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, September 2020*

- 'Where would you like me to start! I'm incredibly angry with the Trust and certain staff members namely the OT and physio who were involved with the patients safety and discharge. The patient even had a fall whilst in hospital. I feel I was not consulted and not given test results even though I'd explained to the staff that the patient didn't understand and couldn't hear properly and that they should talk to me about him.' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, September 2020*
- 'As her carer and daughter also my father very involved as she had very complex issues, my mother can give the wrong information, pre Covid we are able to liaise with the medical people on her Health etc., during Covid we have found it impossible to have a conversation on these issues, resulting in errors in her care' - *Patient discharged from Princess Royal Hospital, November 2020*

How our findings compare to the results of the national survey run by Healthwatch England

Our findings were similar to those of the national Healthwatch England (HWE) survey:

- HWE found that 19% felt they were not ready to leave hospital - this figure was slightly higher at 24% in our survey
- 82% of respondents to the HWE survey didn't receive a follow up visit or assessment - we found that 76% of respondents to our survey didn't receive a visit
- HWE found that 61% didn't receive information about the new discharge process - 68% of respondents to our survey had not received this information
- HWE found that 30% of people who were tested for COVID-19 didn't receive their results before they left hospital - this figure was lower for respondents to our survey at 19%
- HWE were told that 64% of people discharged at night weren't asked if they needed transport support - only 5 people who responded to our survey were discharged at night, of which 1 was not asked if they needed support with transport (for comparison 20% of those discharged at night)

Service provider response

Healthwatch Shropshire and Healthwatch Telford & Wrekin shared the report and survey responses with the Integrated Discharge Hub multi-agency team to ask for their comments on our key findings and what work is underway to continue to develop and embed this service:

The System Senior Responsible Officer for Discharge said that the System had worked closely with Healthwatch to develop and promote the survey. They welcomed the opportunity to use real patient experience to improve the discharge process further and thanked patients, or their relatives and carers for taking the time to complete the survey. As is noted in some of the responses, this has been an unprecedented time for health and social care staff and the pressure to keep all patients safe has, at times, been incredibly tough. They thank all patients, or relatives and carers and Healthwatch for working with them to improve the patient experience going forward.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Shropshire & Healthwatch Telford & Wrekin would like to thank the organisations who helped to promote this survey. We particularly thank all those people receiving services who have shared their experiences with us.



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Get in Touch

Please contact Healthwatch to share your views and experiences of this service or any other health and social care service in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin. We gather comments anonymously and share them with service commissioners and providers to highlight areas of good practice and identify areas for improvement.

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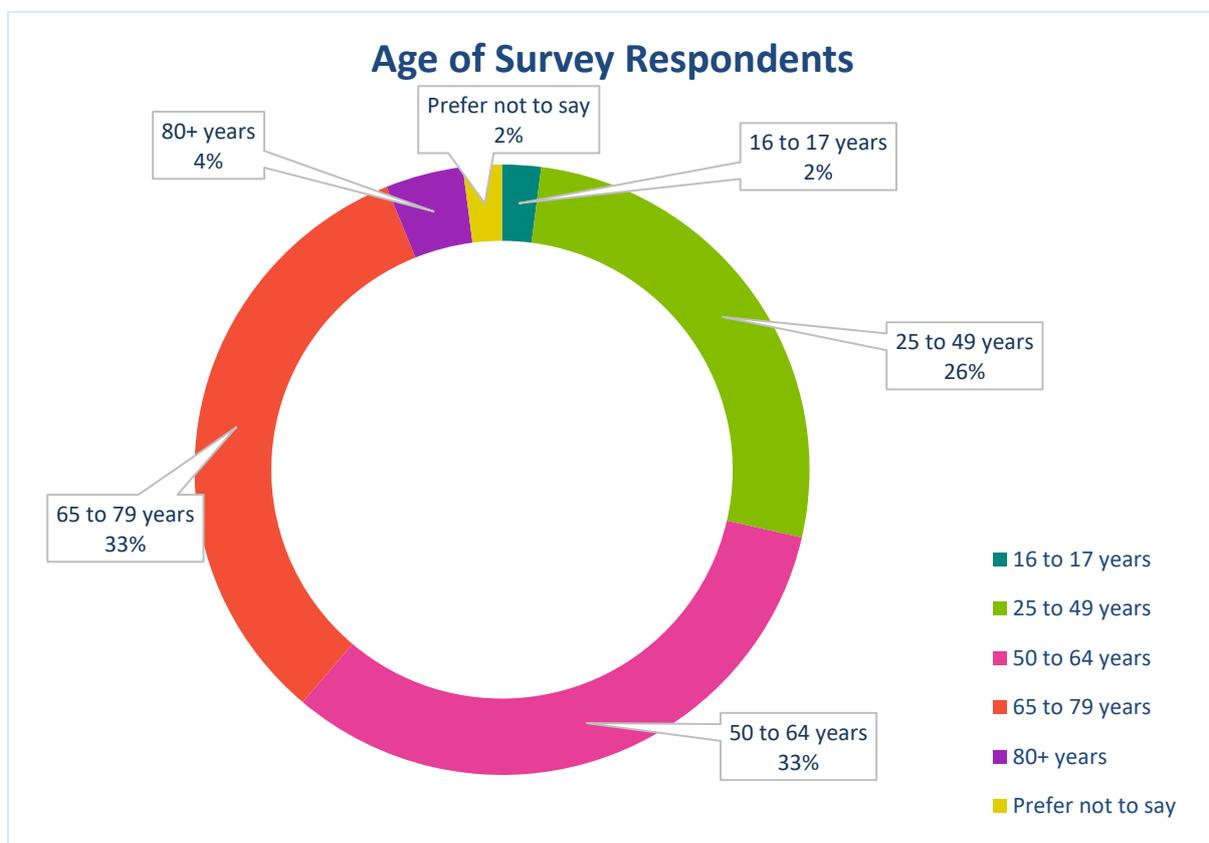
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Appendix A - Demographics

The majority of our survey respondents were women (74%) from white ethnic backgrounds (95%).

The age range of our respondents was evenly spread between the working age and older age groups. The general age demographic of people who responded to our hospital discharge survey is consistent with the age distribution of people who are admitted to NHS hospitals in England, according to the Hospital Admitted Patient Care Activity 2019/20 data⁵.



58% of respondents told us that they had a long-term health condition and 18% told us they had a disability.

⁵ [Hospital Admitted Patient Care Activity 2019-20 - NHS Digital](#)

Appendix B - Survey Questions

Tell us about your experience of leaving hospital during COVID-19

1. Please choose the option that best describes you:*

- I am a patient who has left hospital since March 2020 [directed to question 2]
- I am an unpaid carer/relative (including receivers of carers allowance) of someone who has left hospital since March 2020 [directed to question 24, questions 3 to 23 will be hidden]
- I am a paid care worker of someone who has left hospital since March 2020 [directed to question 24 questions 3 to 23 will be hidden]

2. What hospital were you treated and discharged from?

If you were discharged from one hospital to another hospital before being discharged home or to another home in the community please complete this survey separately for both discharges.

- Royal Shrewsbury Hospital
- Princess Royal Hospital
- Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital
- The Redwoods
- Ludlow Community Hospital
- Whitchurch Community Hospital
- Bridgnorth Community Hospital
- Bishop's Castle Community Hospital
- Other (please specify) [Free Text]

3. Which ward, department or service was treating you?

[Free Text]

4. Please tell us when you left hospital (were discharged)

- March 2020
- April 2020
- May 2020

- June 2020
- July 2020
- August 2020
- September 2020

5. Please tell us what day you left hospital

- Monday - Thursday
- Friday
- Saturday/Sunday
- Not sure

6. Please tell us what time of day you left hospital

- During the day (between 8am and 8pm)
- During the night (between 8pm and 8am)
- Don't know

7. Pick the area that best describes where you live

- Shropshire
- Telford & Wrekin
- Powys
- Other [Free Text]

8. When you were in hospital, were you given information explaining that the process of leaving hospital has changed due to coronavirus (COVID-19)?

- Yes, I was given this information
- No, I was not given this information
- Don't know

9. How long did you wait between being told you were well enough to leave hospital and actually leaving the hospital?

- Less than 1 hour
- Between 1 hour and 2 hours
- Between 2 hours and 24 hours
- More than 24 hours
- Don't know

10. Did you feel prepared to leave hospital?

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, to some extent
- No

- Don't know
- Could you tell us more [Free Text]

11. Before you were discharged, were you asked about your care and support needs? (For example, were you involved in the discussion about your care plan?)

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

12. Was it agreed that you would receive support from health and/or social care services after you left hospital (for example, home visits from a care worker)?

- Yes, I knew what support would be provided before I left hospital
- Yes, but I was told my specific needs would be assessed after I left hospital
- Nobody talked to me about support
- No, I was told I would not need support
- Don't know

13. Were you given information about who to contact if you needed further health advice or support after leaving hospital?

- Yes, I was given this information
- No, I was not given this information
- No, I didn't want/need this information
- Don't know

14. During the time you spent in hospital, were you tested for coronavirus (COVID-19)?

- Yes
 - If yes, Supplementary Question: Were the results known when you were discharged (Yes, no, don't know)
- No
- Don't know

15. Before you left hospital, were you asked if you needed support in getting transport to the place you were discharged to?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

16. How did you travel to the place where you were discharged to?

- A relative/unpaid carer drove me
- Taxi
- Hospital transport
- Public transport
- Volunteer Transport (e.g. British Red Cross, NHS volunteer responder)
- I drove myself
- A care worker drove me
- Other [Free Text]

17. Did a member of staff discuss with you where you were going to be discharged to?

- Yes, and I was discharged to the place I wanted to be discharged to
- Yes, but I was not discharged to the place I wanted to be discharged to
- No, it wasn't discussed with me
- Don't know

18. Where did you go after leaving hospital?

- I went to my own home
- I went to my own home and family/friends came to stay with me
- I went to stay with family or friends
- I was transferred to another hospital
- I went to a nursing or care home
- I went to temporary accommodation (e.g. hotel room with domiciliary support)
- I went somewhere else

19. After leaving hospital, were you visited by a health professional to assess your support needs (this is called a discharge assessment)?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

20. Do you have any support needs for which you don't have any help with at the moment?

- Yes
 - Supplementary question Please tells about this [Free Text]
- No

- Don't know

21. Was this your first experience of hospital discharge?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

In your own words, please describe your experience of leaving hospital.

Tell us how supported you felt, and how well the NHS and social care helped you recover/manage your condition (please refer to what you were in hospital for and the specific services you received, where you can).

22. What went well?

[Free Text]

23. What could have been better?

[Free Text]

Carers questions

24. What hospital was your friend, relative or client treated and discharged from?

- Royal Shrewsbury Hospital
- Princess Royal Hospital
- Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital
- The Redwoods
- Ludlow Community Hospital
- Whitchurch Community Hospital
- Bridgnorth Community Hospital
- Bishop's Castle Community Hospital
- Other (please specify) [Free Text]

25. Which ward, department or service was treating your friend, relative or client?

[Free Text]

26. Please tell us when your friend, relative or client left hospital (were discharged)

- March 2020
- April 2020

- May 2020
- June 2020
- July 2020
- August 2020
- September 2020

27. Please tell us what day your friend, relative or client left hospital

- Monday - Thursday
- Friday
- Saturday/Sunday
- Not sure

28. Please tell us what time of day your friend, relative or client left hospital

- During the day (between 8am and 8pm)
- During the night (between 8pm and 8am)
- Don't know

29. Pick the area that best describes where your friend, relative or client lives

- Shropshire
- Telford & Wrekin
- Powys
- Other [Free Text]

30. When your friend, relative or client was in hospital, were they given information explaining that the process of leaving hospital has changed due to coronavirus (COVID-19)?

- Yes, they were given this information
- No, they were not given this information
- Don't know

31. How long did your friend, relative or client wait between being told they were well enough to leave hospital and actually leaving the hospital?

- Less than 1 hour
- Between 1 hour and 2 hours
- Between 2 hours and 24 hours
- More than 24 hours
- Don't know

32. Do you think your friend, relative or client felt prepared to leave hospital?

- Yes, definitely

- Yes, to some extent
- No
- Don't know
- Could you tell us more [Free Text]

33. Before they were discharged, were they asked about your care and support needs? (For example, were you involved in the discussion about your care plan?)

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

34. Was it agreed that they would receive support from health and/or social care services after they left hospital (for example, home visits from a care worker)?

- Yes, someone talked to them in the hospital about their needs
- Yes, but they were told their specific needs would be assessed after they left hospital
- No, nobody talked to them about support
- They were told they would not need support
- Don't know

35. Was your friend, relative or client given information about who to contact if they needed further health advice or support after leaving hospital?

- Yes, they were given this information
- No, they were not given this information
- No, they didn't want/need this information
- Don't know

36. During the time your friend, relative or client spent in hospital, were they tested for coronavirus (COVID-19)?

- Yes
 - If yes, Supplementary Question: Were the results known when they were discharged (Yes, no, don't know)
- No
- Don't know

37. Before your friend, relative or client left hospital, were they asked if they needed support in getting transport to the place they were discharged to?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

38. How did your friend, relative or client travel to the place where they were discharged to?

- A relative/unpaid carer drove them
- Taxi
- Hospital transport
- Public transport
- Volunteer Transport (e.g. British Red Cross, NHS volunteer responder)
- They drove themselves
- A care worker drove them
- Other [Free Text]

39. Did anyone discuss with your friend, relative or client where they were going to be discharged to?

- Yes, and they were discharged to the place they wanted to be discharged to
- Yes, but they were not discharged to the place they wanted to be discharged to
- No, it wasn't discussed with them
- Don't know

40. Where did your friend, relative or client go after leaving hospital?

- They went to their own home
- They went to their own home and family/friends came to stay with them
- They went to stay with family or friends
- They were transferred to another hospital
- They went to a nursing or care home
- They went to temporary accommodation (e.g. hotel room with domiciliary support)
- They went somewhere else

41. After leaving hospital, was your friend, relative or client} visited by a health professional to assess their support needs (this is called a discharge assessment)?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

42. Does your friend, relative or client have any support needs for which they don't have any help with at the moment?

- Yes
 - Supplementary question Please tells about this [Free Text]
- No
- Don't know

Your experience as a carer

43. As a carer did you feel sufficiently involved and informed in decision-making about your friend, relative or client's discharge from hospital?

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, to some extent
- No, but I should have been involved
- No, but I didn't want/the patient didn't want me to be involved
- No, but I didn't need to be involved as I am a paid care worker
- Don't know

44. As a carer, do you feel that your own caring responsibilities were considered in the decision making about your friend, relative or client's care and support after they left hospital?

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, to some extent
- No, but they should have been
- No, but they didn't need to be as I am a paid care worker
- Don't know

45. As a carer, did you have enough information to support your friend, relative or client after they left hospital?

- Yes, definitely
- Yes, to some extent

- No
- Don't know

46. Was this your first experience of supporting someone through hospital discharge?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

In your own words, please describe your experience of your friend, relative or client leaving hospital.

Tell us how supported you/your friend/relative/client felt, and how well the NHS and social care helped your friend/relative or client to recover/manage their condition (Please refer to what they were in hospital for and the specific services they received, where you can).

47. What went well?

[Free Text]

48. What could have been better?

[Free Text]

Tell us a bit about you

By telling us more information about yourself, you will help us better understand how people's experiences may differ depending on their personal characteristics. However, if you do not wish to answer these questions you do not have to.

There followed a series of demographic questions to be completed by the person completing the questionnaire (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, religion, disability, long term health conditions and carer status)