



RE: Right Chair Right Time Right Now: Wheelchair Charter

Dear Members of the LMC

As a clinician you will understand how vitally important it is that patients receive the appropriate treatment and equipment needed to aid their recovery and prevent further deterioration. In many aspects the NHS has managed to achieve this, with waiting times that have come down considerably over the last few years and the ability to ensure urgent review for patients with acute care needs such as cancer.

Unfortunately wheelchair services appear to have been left behind and many clinicians find themselves faced with examples of newly diagnosed patients with rapidly progressive, life-limiting illnesses who fail to ever secure a wheelchair before they become bed bound or reach the terminal phase of their illness; alongside the many patients who sustain injury and worsening disability due to inappropriate wheelchair provision or long delays waiting for repair. Many of these patients suffer prolonged periods of hospitalisation for pressure ulcers, contractures and other equipment-related delays or injuries.

The Wheelchair Leadership Alliance is raising the profile of wheelchair services, and encouraging NHS commissioners to look at the local services being commissioned and provided in the hope of securing equitable services for wheelchair users and the clinicians who treat them every day. To this end they have launched a national Charter that includes key objectives related to wheelchair services.

It's easy to feel uncertain as to whether the principles encapsulated in the Charter, can be delivered; but then we can look back to how insurmountable standards such as the 18 week Referral to Treatment and cancer waiting time targets appeared until they started to be achieved. Now it seems impossible to imagine not expecting a patient with suspected cancer to be seen within two weeks but less than a decade ago it seemed unrealistic.

The aim is now that within a few years, delays of six months for basic wheelchairs and repairs that leave patients bed-bound for 10 days will be unimaginable.

As practitioners delivering NHS health services, you will be aware of the five Domains that make up the national NHS Outcomes Framework. It is clear that the work the Wheelchair Alliance has done in developing the Charter addresses aspects of all of the Domains - it will help 'enhance the quality of life for people with long term conditions' and work to 'ensure people have a positive experience of care'; but none more so than Domain 5, 'treating and caring for people in a safe environment, and protecting them from avoidable harm'.

But, the Wheelchair Leadership Alliance can't do this work alone and one of the strongest voices in our community is the voice of local clinicians. One of the strongest voices in our community is your voice.

I would urge you and your CCG to read and sign-up to the Charter and work to embed its objectives in your everyday business.

It's easy to do by going to www.rightwheelchair.org.uk and clicking on the "Pledge Support" button at the top of any of its pages. Signing up to the Charter will provide clear recognition that you support the need to implement improvements nationally which will underpin the proposal to include its principles in the NHS England Mandate and enable everyone to put wheelchair provision on an equal footing to other mandated services.

I hope it will become a useful tool for you, your committee and practices, and for commissioners right across England.

Yours sincerely

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Wheelchair user and Wheelchair Alliance Member