

Winner 2020 CHA Innovation and Best Practice Award related to Covid-19

Staff Support through the Repurposing of Tewkesbury Hospitals' Abbey View Ward

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Summary:

In preparation for altering the focus of Tewkesbury Hospitals' Abbeyview ward in to a Covid End of Life care unit, hospital and staff embarked on a substantial transformation project. This was to take place over the course of one week and would require hospital staff to provide a model of care they were unaccustomed to, in an environment most were unfamiliar with, working to processes and procedures that were both untested and under constant review and change.

Initially, the repurposing of the hospital was to provide End of Life Care to patients positive with Covid-19. Over the following weeks this change of role was modified to include caring for patients requiring rehabilitation to meet the needs of the local population and to support our healthcare partners across Gloucestershire.

This extensive program of change was supported by multidisciplinary staff from all departments within the hospital and colleagues from other community hospitals; backed by corporate services and senior management, including a herculean effort by the Estates team to ensure we were well prepared for the environmental challenges anticipated.

Background:

Tewkesbury Hospital Abbeyview ward provides rehabilitation care for patients across Gloucestershire. The hospital also provides Physiotherapy, Podiatry, Occupational Therapy, Outpatient and Theatre services along with a minor Injuries and Illness Unit. These services are supported by dedicated Housekeeping and Administrative staff. During March, as the level of Covid-19 cases rose, it was decided that Abbeyview ward would be best suited to become a dedicated Covid EOL care ward. A large scale but local project was undertaken to manage this change whilst ensuring our hospital staff were able to provide the high quality, individualised patient care that is at the heart of our community hospital.

The support that staff received from each other, hospital managers, senior management, corporate support staff, the local community and of course our patients and their families. This was cemented by the ward nurses and Allied Health Professionals, with special mention to the ward Healthcare Assistants, who went out of their way to teach us every skill we could possibly need to work on a ward, with enthusiasm and professionalism.

These were the pivotal factors that helped us provide the fantastic care provided to our patients, in very difficult circumstances, we are all proud to have achieved.

Description:

During the lead up to the change of role for Abbeyview ward, daily meetings and discussions were undertaken including all stakeholders, involved in the running of the hospital. To ensure we were able to provide the safest environment for both patients and staff, ideas and processes were changed daily.

The staff groups within the hospital (Nurses, Physiotherapists, Housekeepers, Admin, Operating Department Practitioners, Health Care Assistants, Occupational Therapists) were asked to volunteer on the ward, supported by the Nursing management. Staff who were able to work on the ward were provided with a full and rigorous package of training devised and undertaken locally by the Training Sister and ward staff competent in the required areas. The training package included: ward based manual handling and equipment, SystmOne, End of Life care, ward process and procedures (along with developing these themselves and constantly reviewing and changing to meet infection control requirements). Training in PPE was supported by our infection control Nurse; this was a challenging aspect of supporting our teams. Media coverage had set different expectations to PHE's guidelines which led to some very difficult and frank conversations. However, due to the emotional intelligence, empathy and compassion shown by the team and honesty from the staff, who were understandably afraid, these difficulties were overcome, the result being that the next day everyone had signed up to the PPE procedure. The Director of Nursing ensured staff were aware that they would be provided with whatever was required to make them feel safe, even though evidence showed that high level of PPE was not required. All of this was reinforced with 121s.

Personal support provided to the hospital staff was instrumental in enabling staff to feel valued and cared for, we were provided with a shower block, accommodation for those with family members at risk, food (pizzas, curry's, Chinese food and frozen meals to name just a few!). The community sent in flowers, thank you cards, plants, tea and coffee, beauty and care products along with masks, theatre caps and hair bands.

Working practices were also changed to allow for more breaks, shorter shift patterns, extra staff above the required establishment, a buddy system for those who had never worked on a ward before and to ensure PPE was donned and doffed safely. A local 24hr senior rota (from both Tewkesbury and North Cotswolds hospital) was set up to ensure out of hours decision making was supported.

Staff from NHC volunteered to support the staff by working on the ward or backfilling other positions. Letters were also sent to staff from the hospital Matron to both prepare and thank them for their endeavours.

Mental health colleagues were available for 121s or drop-in sessions alongside Psychologists to help staff cope with the stress of both work and their personal lives supported by a robust Occupational Health service. A 'Wobble room' in the operating theatre staff room was set up, so staff could take time away from the rest of the hospital.

The feedback received from patients was testament to the safe and personalised care our patients received. The overall feedback from staff was positive despite the huge pressure and anxiety that affected us all.

The transferable skills that have been learnt by the redeployed staff and the application of those skills in their substantive posts is immeasurable. Our Theatre Administrator worked on the ward as a HCA, having never worked in a clinical role previously. She now works clinically in theatre to support our new Covid pathway using the skills gained during this time. On a personal level, as an Operating Department Practitioner and Theatre Manager, I learned more about patient care in the eight weeks spent clinical on the ward, than in my last ten years in a Band 7 role!

The redeployment to the ward and the support we received from all stakeholders evidences the value that Tewkesbury Hospital has in the hearts of the community. Our staff and patients hail from many parts of the world and the training was tailored to be inclusive and diverse to allow our patients to be cared for with dignity, respect and individualism.

2022 Update

The team are continuing to utilise Skype and mobile technology to aid patients in communicating with their relatives on Abbeyview. The technology has also been transferred into Theatre where the iPads are used for Friends and Family surveys.

Theatre staff continue to support Abbeyview ward when short staffed, even covering shifts over Christmas and New Year 21/22

Competencies, such as hoisting, learned on Abbeyview ward, have been used in theatres. Previously patients who required hoisting could not be operated on. That is now not the case.

There is a much closer relationship between Abbeyview and Theatre (in the past, there has almost felt like a disconnect between the two departments due to a lack of understanding of each other's roles). This improved relationship has continued with new staff who have recently joined the ward and theatre, so there has been a definite culture shift.

New personal relationships have blossomed between staff during the redeployment. Now everyone has to listen to Aprils' terrible jokes!

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In December 2020 the Community Hospitals Association Innovation and Best Practice Awards took place.

The judging panel were unanimous in identifying this as one of two projects carried out at Tewkesbury Hospital which were combined to form one of two winning entries for the category related to Covid-19.

Our judges said:

It was very impressive how quickly and efficiently this was pulled together. It was pleasing to know the staff all volunteered for this work.

What an achievement you have had in response to the COVID 19 pandemic and in supporting your staff through a time of uncertainty and change very much on the front line. This is an incredible success story of what can happen when you work together. Everything you have achieved in a short space of time was quite incredible, and it was clear from listening to your sharing how proud you are of what you and your team were able to deliver. Well done.

The level of staff engagement despite the short timeframe was impressive. The teamwork and learning were clear throughout the presentation and this is an achievement the whole team should be proud of.

Abbeyview Ward, Tewkesbury Hospital was identified to change its focus to a Covid-19 End of Life care unit. The two projects of communication and staff support together have received very positive feedback from all staff, patients, relatives and carers and together the work undertaken at Tewkesbury deserves a CHA Innovations and Best Practice Award.