

DISABILITY INFORMATION IN HOSPITALS

A research study to ascertain the benefits of making basic disability information available to patients while they are in hospital, or attending outpatient clinics, and to examine the most appropriate ways in which such information should be provided. Researched and written by Celia Hayfield

Background

Hospitals are ideally placed to provide disabled people with information about national and community services, financial benefits and opportunities that could greatly enhance the quality of their lives, their health and well being. However, few, if any, have set up any system to ensure this happens. As a result, patients lose out when their need is greatest. The results of a survey in a hospital where this does now take place are described below.

Results

More than 80 questionnaires were received back from patients. 97% had read the leaflet and found the information useful. Although, most patients found the leaflet of general interest, a number also said that they found certain organisations or services specifically useful particularly benefits, advice (Citizens Advice Bureaux and Legal Advice and Services) and disability information. Motoring, aids and equipment and travel were also useful, followed by information about national disability organisations, holidays, older people and pain.

Crucial to the success of the project was the identification of the right person to supervise the arrangements – the coordinator. Personal visits and discussion were also necessary to identify those health professionals best placed to act as ‘gatekeeper’ to the information.

Many patients volunteered very positive comments about the leaflet. In the vast majority of cases, patients indicated that they had not been previously aware of the service or organisation mentioned.

Most health professionals thought that they were the right people to disseminate this kind of information, as they were more likely to have specific knowledge of the patient and their needs. This meant that, if necessary, they could give further guidance on a one-to-one basis. On the wards, nurses were felt to be more suitable than therapists as they had more contact with patients.

Health professionals were sensitive to the fact that many patients do not think of themselves as disabled and also that not everyone with a disability needs help. Therefore any offers of information should be handled with tact and discretion.

Several health professionals working in out-patient clinics suggested that a poster could be produced and displayed in the clinic. This would tell patients about the availability of the leaflet and invite them to ask for a copy. It was pointed out that some patients prefer to find out things for themselves.

Recommendations

1. A book that puts all the main sources of information in one user-friendly ring binder and is updated regularly should be placed in every outpatient clinic attended by patients with disabilities. It also needs to be accessible to all appropriate staff working in these areas
2. Dissemination of a patient information leaflet should be an integral part of in-patient and out-patient consultation.
3. In outpatient clinics the person who gives out the leaflets needs to be somebody who can if necessary offer further help and guidance to patients without being obtrusive. This should preferably be a therapist or other clinician.
4. A poster should be produced to inform patients of the availability of leaflets at outpatient clinics, as an addition to information offered by the health professional.