

20th June 2011

Dignity and respect is at the heart of caring for older people

Everyone receiving care, whether in hospital or elsewhere, deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. As Lesley Griffiths, Minister for Health and Social Services, said recently: “Good intentions are simply not enough.”

The NHS in Wales is in full agreement with that statement and is committed to backing up the good intentions - which abound throughout the service from all types of staff - with good, strong, effective actions.

Last week NHS organisations submitted their formal responses to the report published by the Older People’s Commissioner for Wales, *Dignified Care?*

The Commissioner looked at the care older people receive in Welsh hospitals and whether they are being treated with dignity and respect.

The report recounts the experiences of patients who are full of praise for their treatment, but there are also examples of older people being let down by poor practice.

In their responses to the Commissioner, NHS organisations in Wales spelled out their commitment to implementing all the report’s recommendations and improving standards of care for older people in all our hospital wards.

The NHS was clear in its message: we take this issue very seriously and we will do everything we can to get it right.

Caring for people with compassion goes right to the heart of what the NHS does.

The health service is there to make people feel better, and where the opposite has happened and patients feel worse, the NHS is clear that that is unacceptable.

The vast majority of all NHS staff want to do their best for their patients and, mostly, they do a very good job. That ‘mostly’ needs to become ‘always’.

Sometimes we all need reminding that it’s the simple things that can make a big, positive difference – for example, asking if a patient would prefer to be addressed by their first name or by their title, or making sure that private and sensitive conversations can’t be overheard.

In addition, the NHS fully supports the view of the Older People’s Commissioner that older people must raise their expectations of how they should be treated by the NHS.

But once those expectations are raised, the NHS will ensure that they are met.

That is why NHS organisations across Wales are putting dignity and respect firmly at the top of the boardroom, as well as the ward, agenda.

Examples of how the NHS is supporting its staff to improve hospital care for older people are many and varied. They range from appointing new specialist dementia nurses to train general ward staff in the care of older patients with dementia, to using 'dignity pegs' to ensure curtains remain closed during treatment and displaying a 'dignity charter' at every bedside.

Ward sisters are being given direct authority to select their own staff and manage their development. Ward layouts are changing to provide separate quiet rooms for private consultations. Volunteer 'befrienders' who can spend time with patients and run errands for them have proved such a success in some hospitals that others are running campaigns to recruit more.

Talking to patients – and making the time to do so – is key to dignity and respect. On some wards these conversations are used to record a patient's story of their hospital stay and to gain a patient's view of the care they have received. Older people are invited to give opinions on design and layout of new hospital wards by visiting mock-up rooms.

A lot of these initiatives are already happening in Welsh hospitals. The challenge now is to make sure this high standard is applied everywhere.

Although we understand that going into hospital can be a daunting experience, we want to make sure patients have the confidence not to accept poor practice, but to challenge it.

We want to create a culture where patients feel comfortable to speak up if they feel their dignity and privacy is being compromised.

The NHS is making its commitment clear to the Commissioner, and to the public, that providing dignified care for older people is a priority – and that we're taking action.

The NHS in Wales is making progress. When the Older People's Commissioner revisits our hospitals we are confident that she will see 'good intentions' turned into consistently good practice.