Day in the Life of a porter

Porters play an invaluable role supporting the day to day running of a Health Board, working across all sites. They transport patients, equipment, medication, samples and test results from one place to another, enabling care and services to continue.

Kay Tossell, portering team leader at Neath Port Talbot Hospital, explains:

“At the start of each day, we open each of the departments and office areas ready for people to start work. We visit the Minor Injuries Unit (MIU) and Endoscopy Suite to take away any clinical waste or dirty linen, and make sure the trolleys are ready for patients, including changing the oxygen cylinders when necessary. We make three trips to the MIU during the day to collect the waste and linen.

“We also collect the medicine box from the pharmacy to take the prescriptions to each ward. In addition, we take samples from different clinical areas to the lab, and when ready, take the results back to the wards.

“At the end of the day, we lock all the departments which aren’t open at night and at 11pm lock the main doors. We do walk around the grounds at night to check everything is as it should be.”

Picture: Chris Johns, porter at Neath Port Talbot Hospital, locates a wheelchair for a patient

Porters work 24/7. As well as their core duties, they answer requests from other hospital staff to help them meet the needs of patients. If they are needed at any point during the day or night, hospital staff contact the main office with their request. This could be to take samples to pathology, to locate or collect equipment, trolleys or wheelchairs, or to remove unwanted furniture and clutter.

They also take patients to different areas of the hospital, for example from the ward to theatre, x-ray or outpatients department, and when they are ready, take them back to their ward. If patients
arrive at the hospital unable to make their own way to where they need to go, the porters locate a wheelchair and take them, helping them back to their car when they are ready.

Chris Johns, porter at Neath Port Talbot Hospital, said:

“I’ve been in the job for 10 years and I love it. I really enjoy meeting people, especially patients. It is also nice to have variety in the job as no two days are the same. You are constantly on the go, never in the same space for long. It is a really nice, busy job to have.”

If a cardiac arrest occurs on a ward or in a department, two porters have to respond. They take the crash trolley with them, which has all the essential equipment medical staff need in an emergency situation. The porters then remain close by in case they are needed to get urgent supplies such as blood or further equipment.

When a patient passes away on a ward, porters are called to take them to the mortuary. If a doctor needs to check the body after it has been taken, for example looking for pacemakers, the porters accompany them to mortuary to assist.

Kay added:

“In Neath Port Talbot Hospital we are based by the main entrance, in an office with the security camera screens. By being aware of what is happening around the hospital if we see something happen on the monitor we can respond immediately. It could be a patient collapses and we need to find a trolley, or something happening in the car park which might need our support.

“Also in our office are the alarm panels which are connected to various areas around the hospital. If a fire alarm sounds we go to the area to investigate if it is genuine or if it is a false alarm. If it is real we wait for the fire brigade. If it is a false alarm, we let them know as soon as possible so they don’t have a wasted journey.

“We can also access the alarms for certain departments, so when they finish each evening we set it for them and switch it off in the morning. During the night, if an alarm sounds, we go to the area to find out the reason why. If it happens in the pharmacy and we
can’t see a reason why, we contact the on-call pharmacist who may need to come in.

“The role of a porter really is an anything and everything kind of job. The feeling of being able to help so many different departments makes the job so worthwhile.”