Day in the life of a bed manager

The bed manager’s role is quite a diverse one.

As well as keeping the flow of patients moving through our hospitals they have a key role in managing operational issues which affect the hospital site and can impact on the safe and efficient functioning of the service.

Acting as the link between the hospital and senior management within the health board, they initiate the first response to business continuity incidents such as telecommunications failures, electrical supply failures and floods, to name a few.

*Picture l-r: bed managers Lisa Lewis and Tracey Devlugt*

Devlugt

Managing bed capacity is the other important part of the bed manager’s role.

They work with staff in the emergency departments to identify the demand for hospital beds and work to ensure that patients are assessed and either discharged or admitted to a bed within the Welsh Government unscheduled care target.

They regularly speak to ward managers and assessment unit staff to find beds for patients who need them as part of unscheduled care. They see how many beds are free, including those due to become available later in the day.

Tracey Devlugt works at Morriston and Singleton hospitals. She said:

“Ensuring patients have timely access to a bed is key.”
“Our first job of the day is to update Citrix, a system used by all Welsh hospitals, with how busy we are. At midday we update it with how many beds we have available.

“Conference calls take place throughout the day, especially when the situation is tight, as all the hospitals try to help each other.

“We walk around the hospital three or four times a day, visiting every ward to see their capacity. We also check if there are any planned discharges, as this will mean more beds later on.

“Forward planning is vital in this job and we are constantly looking ahead to what problems could arise.

“Even if patients are moving in and out of beds nicely, we still need to have plans in place in case the situation changes.”

It isn’t just emergency patients arriving who need the help of bed managers. Sometimes patients already in hospital will need to transfer to a different ward or hospital to better meet their needs.

It is always a clinical decision if a patient needs to be moved, and a doctor makes the request. It is then up to bed managers to work with ward managers and colleagues in other hospitals to see if it is possible.

Lisa Lewis also covers the two Swansea hospitals. She added:

“Where we can we place patients on wards specific to their medical condition. However, this isn’t always possible, so when a more appropriate bed is available, we move them.

“We also transfer patients to and from other hospitals, both inside and outside ABMU. This could be to bring them closer to home or because they would benefit from a particular ward or service.

“It can put pressure on other hospitals if we are asking them to accept one of our patients, and vice versa. So when it’s clinically possible we may swap a patient to keep the flow moving.

“Other requests we receive are from consultants treating patients in the community, for example with cancer. If their condition deteriorates they ask us to find a bed for them in the hospital.”

Being a bed manager doesn’t just stop at finding beds; they also provide support to hospital managers.
Bed managers are fire officers for their hospital, so it is their responsibility to meet the fire brigade in the area the alarm has sounded.

In addition they are part of the cardiac arrest team which responds when someone collapses in non-ward areas.

They also are responsible for patients who leave the ward without telling anyone. They search the grounds to find them and contact the police to cover the wider area.

Tracey said:

“Often when patients are missing from the ward it isn’t a really serious situation, as they may have just gone to the shop or for some fresh air and just neglected to tell anyone.

“However, we have to be sure they are okay, especially if they are elderly or vulnerable, as they may have gone further afield.”

If a patient needs sectioning under the Mental Health Act, the bed managers go to the ward to assess the situation.

It is their job to determine if it is a necessary intervention and, if so, send the paperwork to the relevant facility.

Any out of hours complaints received concerning care or hospital services are directed to the bed managers. Any which aren’t urgent are passed to the relevant department to look at the following morning.

However, if something needs addressing immediately, the bed managers will make sure the situation is resolved as soon as possible.

Lisa said:

“I do love my job. Every day is different and you never know where you will be at any given time.

“However, it can be frustrating and stressful, especially when the hospitals are really busy.

“We need to make difficult decisions which are in the best interest of our patients, but aren’t always popular with staff.

“Our priority is getting patients into appropriate beds as quickly as possible, so their diagnosis and treatment can start.”