

## Could a hospital stay be avoided for some patients?

An important role for the NHS is to try to give some patients the care and treatment they need nearer home. Some patients go to A & E and are then given a hospital bed so that they can be observed and/or diagnosed and treated before going home.

Members of Sheffield Emergency Care Forum (SECF) took part in research carried out by researchers from the University of Sheffield (SchARR).

The research team wanted to find out why some patients were given beds when they might have been treated near home if suitable services had been available. The research concentrated on patients with one or more of the following conditions:

- minor head injury
- chest pain
- deep vein thrombosis
- angina
- COPD –respiratory problems
- abdominal pain
- cellulitis
- blocked catheter
- hypoglycaemia
- urinary tract infection
- epilepsy
- falls
- feverish child
- mental health crisis

The team looked at a range of services including those of hospitals and emergency ambulance services. The services included GP practices, Out of Hours GP services, Walk in Centres; Minor Injury Centres and community services such as Community Nursing teams. Researchers spoke to staff who provide and manage emergency care services and patient groups.



Sheffield Emergency Care Forum is a group of patients, carers, medical students and ambulance service representatives who are interested in health research. The SECF is an independent patient and public involvement group (PPI) and works with researchers from the University of Sheffield on research relating to pre-hospital, urgent and emergency care.

## What researchers found:

- Hospitals in major urban areas with high unemployment and deprivation were more likely to admit patients who came to A & E.
- Some A & E staff admitted patients if they were unsure that suitable treatment could be given at or near home. Some areas had community teams to support patients in their own homes
- Hospital staff reported that having senior staff and/or rapid assessment teams helped to reduce admissions
- Some hospitals had more beds than others and admitted more patients
- Staff reported that if ambulance crews could not find suitable care near the patient's home, they took them to A & E for timely treatment
- People in rural areas used hospital beds less than city dwellers
- Staff reported that some community beds were hard to access so patients had to be admitted to an emergency hospital bed
- Staff reported that social services were sometimes slow to respond but this could be caused by lack of resources
- Staff reported that integration of health and social care services helped to reduce admissions
- Some ambulance services were able to treat patients at home. This reduced admissions.

## Implications for patients

In view of the findings, SECF members think that patients and patient groups should demand better services nearer home:

- It is essential that health and social services work together to provide care in the community. These services need to be available so that ambulance staff can refer patients to them. Local care and treatment might prevent unnecessary admissions.
- Improvements to health and social services should be targeted at areas of high unemployment and/or deprivation.
- Patients should be encouraged to manage their own long term medical conditions where appropriate.
- Information about alternatives to A & E should be widely distributed.
- There should be streamlining of the access to community beds.



Extra funding is needed if we wish to have suitable Health, Social and Mental Health care available. We could avoid some hospital stays by having reliable local services.

If you would like to learn more about this study please contact:

Sheffield Emergency Care Forum

[www.secf.org.uk](http://www.secf.org.uk)

If you need health care or advice you could save time and effort by contacting one of these:

- NHS 111 (telephone advice service)
- Pharmacy (for self care advice)
- Your GP
- Your GP Out of Hours service
- NHS Walk-in-Centre
- Minor Injuries Unit

Ring 999 or go to A & E if you really need urgent care.



pharmacy  
**Visited A & E recently?**

*Why?*

**Was there treatment nearer home?**

*If not, why not?*

**Were you given a hospital bed?**

*Did you really need it?*

**22% didn't! Read the patients' viewpoint...**

