

# Patients sent home in dressing gowns

**Kat Lay** Health Correspondent

Patients are being discharged from hospitals in dressing gowns to empty homes and without medication or support, according to a new report.

Healthwatch England also expressed concerns over the level of bed-blocking in the NHS, with patients fit to go home but staying in hospital.

The watchdog talked to more than 2,000 people about their experiences in the past two years. In a report in 2015 it had criticised “shocking” cases and “common basic failings” leading to emergency readmissions and deaths.

While hospitals are doing better overall, Healthwatch said that people “still don’t feel involved in decisions or that they have been given the information they need” and that they continue to experience delays and a lack of co-ordination between services.

In July an average of 5,861 beds a day were occupied by patients fit to go home, up 23.4 per cent on the same month in 2015, although down slightly year on year. The majority of delays were caused by the NHS, but the number attributed to social care services rose to 37 per cent from 30 per cent two years ago. The watchdog said

that patients sometimes had to stay in hospital because non-emergency transport was not available to take them home.

Healthwatch warned that people felt they did not have access to the services and support they needed after being discharged. A patient who spoke to a Healthwatch branch in Berkshire said: “Discharged without support, with low blood pressure, very weak and unsteady on my feet and diarrhoea.”

A patient in Richmond upon Thames, southwest London, said: “I was discharged in a dressing gown and had to get my own taxi home as transport was not available.”

Imelda Redmond, national director of Healthwatch England, said: “Getting people out of hospital and safely home is ... an ongoing process that requires thought, planning and support before, during and after the moment someone is actually discharged. Things work best when all services work together.”

NHS England said: “This report provides further support for the intensive focus the NHS is giving to safe and speedy hospital discharge, and the related importance of local councils’ actions to ensure proper home care and care home places for frail older people.”

Times 5.10.17