A problem shared.... a whole system approach to improving the timeliness of discharge from Orkney’s remote and rural general hospital

**CONTEXT**

The Balfour Hospital is Orkney’s only secondary care facility with 47 beds to cover all specialities. Given the limited bed pool, delayed discharges can have a dramatic effect on patient flow and the ability of acute services to meet demand. Achieving timely discharge is therefore critical and a project was established in 2016 with the intention of using quality improvement methodology to secure an improvement in the timeliness of discharge, minimising the delays experienced at both a patient and healthcare system level.

**METHODOLOGY**

- Multi disciplinary project team established
- Driver diagram developed and change ideas generated with stakeholders informed by baseline data
- Analysis included Pareto to identify causes of delay and mapping of patient journeys
- Focus on multi disciplinary planning and communication including proactive setting and communication of Estimated Date of Discharge to avoid delay
- Multi disciplinary team meetings established
- Clinical Flows Coordinator post established & attends weekly Allocation of Resources (social care) Committee
- Patient Flow Group established to provide operational, multi disciplinary forum to coordinate improvements across system
- Process mapping of admission through to discharge
- Effective Discharge from Hospital Policy developed

**RESULTS**

- Reduced variation
- Sustained improvement
- Average bed days lost in January = 2 compared to a previous monthly average of 67 over the preceding 14 months
- Equates to >2 beds released over a 12 month period = 4% of overall bed availability in Orkney
- >300 days between hospital red alerts

**CONCLUSION**

Through enhanced partnership working this project sought to improve the quality of life for people accessing health and care services and increase efficiency and effectiveness through minimising delay and enabling people to get back to living at home or in a homely setting as soon as they are medically fit to leave hospital. Seeking to improve patient care in hospital by increasing flow through the system strongly supports the delivery of the 2020 vision for health and social care. Furthermore this project demonstrates the benefits of an integrated approach to care for both those who use services and those who work within them.

**References**