Would you use the new Croydon 'hospital at home' service? patients praise initiative in new Healthwatch Croydon report

Virtual wards a success but 'will not replace face-to-face care'

Healthwatch Croydon has released its second part of our Virtual Wards report that details the findings of a hospital based patient survey on the virtual wards and remote monitoring devices provided by Croydon University Hospital.

In the report, patients play a pivotal role in the shift from normal hospital care to digitalised home-based care, although this "will not replace face-to-face care", according to the Chief Executive at Croydon Health Services NHS Trust.

While patients found many benefits to using the service, improving access to those whose first language is not English needs to be considered as the project develops.

The report is based on findings from a telephone based patient survey, which ran between January and May 2024 and included thirty patients who had used the service in Croydon.

Interestingly almost 90 per cent of those interviewed preferred virtual wards to hospital treatment.

Key Findings:

High satisfaction:
Around 60% rated their virtual ward experience as 'very good', and a further 30 per cent as 'good'.

Preference for home-based care:
The results revealed home-based care patients prefer home-based care as it provided more comfort for the patient, was more convenient, and provided more personalised care.

Ease of use:
The majority of the patients reported virtual ward installations as easy and easy

to use, although some reported struggling and there were concerns as to the reliability of technology.

Information and communication:
63% of participants found the information provided about virtual wards and remote monitoring useful, and most reported the communication from Croydon Hospital was accessible. However, suggestions were made for improvements, including better communication and personalising the information they see.

Support systems:
Patients felt that they had access to healthcare advice and information when they needed, which enhanced their feelings of safety when receiving care at home.

Recommendations for improvement:

The report offers several recommendations to improve virtual ward experiences, including:

Increasing awareness:
Enhance patient education via the hospitals and clinicians, whilst also expanding communications on Virtual Wards to inform more people about virtual wards.

Improving usability:
Simplify the technology for the devices and provide more user-friendly instructions for patients, particularly those who may not be digitally savvy.

Enhancing accessibility:
Make the information available in multiple formats and languages, and implement special accommodations for those with disabilities, like screen readers and voice commands.

Promoting the benefits of virtual wards:
Healthwatch Croydon encourages a complementary role of virtual wards alongside the hospital services to foster greater trust in this technology for the future patients of Croydon Hospital.

The Service 'Will Not Replace Face-To-Face Care', Says Chief Executive:

Matthew Kershaw, Chief Executive at Croydon Health Services NHS Trust and Place-Based Leader for Health said:

"We welcome the publication of this report and would like to thank both Healthwatch Croydon for their research and those who took the time to share their experiences of being cared for by our virtual ward teams.

"We are pleased to see that that patients being cared for through our virtual ward community service had a positive experience and note that we are moving in the right direction, delivering more care closer to home; a wish of many of our patients.

"We are committed to continuously improving how we deliver this care, including how we communicate with patients about the service and are already taking steps to improve the functionality and accessibility of our remote monitoring technology, which helps to compliment, but not replace, the face-to-face care provided by our experienced community clinicians."

Gordon Kay, Healthwatch Croydon Manager, said:

"Applying relevant digital technology can bring many benefits to NHS patients. Virtual Wards has the potential to improve overall patient experiences by looking after them from their homes. Our report has shown how Croydon patients see the benefits of using this service. However, there are some aspects around communication, support and accessibility, or whose first language is not English that need to be considered as the project develops to the next stage. We thank the patients who completed interviews with us for their insights and Croydon University Hospital Virtual Ward team in this project. We look forward to seeing further developments in the service reflecting the suggestions of Croydon patients."

The full report, Experience of Virtual Wards at Croydon University Hospital, is available on the Healthwatch Croydon website.

About Healthwatch Croydon:

Healthwatch Croydon works to get the best out of local health and social care services responding to your voice. From improving services today to helping shape better ones for tomorrow, we listen to your views and experiences and then influence decision-making.