

Neighbours Star



Imagine this...

"One of the most touching things I have seen in my job is a seemingly 'macho' man make a birthday card for his daughter. I run an arts and craft group each week, and I have to admit I was surprised that he joined us. He looked really proud of himself about his artistic endeavour. When he told the group about his daughter he had a tear in his eye, as did I." - HCA

Being away from home and one's social circle is hard, and much more so at a time when love, affection, familiarity, comfort and connection would really help cope with feeling really crap. The Neighbours Star is all about being aware and responsive to the importance of patients' nearest and dearest, and of their wider social and community worlds.

Even patients' warmest relationships with staff can't provide what mates and mums can – not least for obvious reasons of appropriate boundaries! Being in hospital, and specifically a mental health hospital, makes contact with friends and family very welcome for most patients. Again, it's the apparently small things that make all the difference, as one patient points out: "I love writing letters to friends and designing cards for them. And I don't have to worry about finding a post-box because the staff put it in their mail system!"

The Neighbours Star demonstrates how HCAs can support patients' relationships with their friends and family and to nurture positive relationships with their hospital 'neighbours' - other patients.

Imagine this...

An HCA made a leaflet about how patients who don't have visitors can access volunteer befrienders, chaplaincy, advocates and other forms of friendly no-strings-attached support.

Providing information and support not only helps friends and relatives understand and cope with what is happening, but also prepare for when the patient leaves hospital and may well be relying substantially on their help to manage back home. Another patient reflects on how important being able to help their loved ones understand what they were going through was: "I gave information leaflets about my diagnosis to my family and friends. It really helped them understand where I was coming from and that given time and support I would return to being me."

Imagine this...

"I always make a point of sensitively asking patients about their family and friends. I know how important these people are and I want to show that I am interested. My own family have got me through some tough times. If they have supportive relationships in their life I think it's good to encourage them to make contact with them." - HCA

In Wardipedia we mention some of the important complexities and issues that come into play around patient's friends and relatives, as well as some helpful solutions:

For some friends and relatives, it's a huge relief when their loved one is admitted into hospital. They may have been really worried about the person's state of mind and ability to continue coping at home, and may (especially if they're the person's carer) be desperate for a break from the responsibilities and anxieties. But alongside this, they're likely to have all sorts of questions and fears about the person's condition and the conditions they're experiencing as an inpatient. It's easy for patients and staff to forget how scary it can be to have to wait for the ward door to be unlocked, and then suddenly to find yourself even temporarily secured in a ward with not only your loved one but a whole load of other people, some of whom are behaving very unconventionally.

As ever, a cup of tea ideally accompanied by a biscuit and chat goes a long, long way to helping visitors feel welcome, safe and confident, about themselves and their loved one. The issue of confidentiality often soon arises, even with the most general of questions like "So how is Bev doing?" Ward staff are usually very skilled at responding in a way that is in keeping with the patient's wishes about who they want to know what...

From: <http://www.wardipedia.org/57-friends-relatives-and-carers>

HCA's make brilliant 'carer support link workers', a role which embodies all the good stuff about the Neighbours Star. This Star is a perfect way to acknowledge an HCA who undertakes this role. Likewise someone who happily makes frequent hot drinks for visitors, or nurtures peer-to-peer support, well deserves this Star! Supporting patients with using socially-plugged-in technology like email or Skype (or the old school version, the telephone) is another great example of how HCA's enable patients to sustain their important relationships

Related Wardipedia features and examples

56. Mealtimes made special

- The ward switches the TV off during meal times and displays a sign to inform patients about this.

57. Friends, relatives and carers

- There is a Carer's information pack

58. Internet

- A member of staff is allocated on each ward who is sufficiently trained in the use of computers and the internet in order to offer guidance, support, teaching and monitoring of the use.

59. Social media

- The ward has a video-link to help patients maintain regular contact with their family members.

60. Ward website

- Trust has interactive virtual tours of the hospital.

61. Kids visiting

- A box of children's toys is available in the visitor's room dedicated for children's visits; magazines are available in the reception waiting area.

62. Help with housing

- The Involvement Centre offer leaflets and information on housing support services and hold regular drop-in clinics.

63. Volunteering

- Volunteers are recruited not only for ongoing support to patients but also for special one-off events.

64. Money

- Two members of staff have been trained in assisting patients in accessing their appropriate benefits

65. Pointless national days

- Celebrating PNDs has been a huge hit on the ward. A calendar has been produced which showcases the special dates along with ideas for how to celebrate them. They are discussed in community meetings and patients and staff have even created new PNDs!

66. Good news

- There's a board on the ward titled 'Your News'. Everyone is encouraged to share their good news in the form of 'news stories', poems, drawings etc.

Some of the ways patients may benefit from the Neighbours Star:

- Connections with friends, family and carers are supported and strengthened
- Helpful information and support is provided to patients' loved ones
- Patients are supported in developing social networks
- Friends, family and carers are made to feel welcome on the ward and to be informed, reassured and supported
- Patients are able to spend time with their children in a safe and appropriate space

Resources

- <http://www.wardipedia.org/neighbours/>
- *Triangle of Care* (invaluable publication on effective involvement of friends, family and carers.) <http://static.carers.org/files/caretriangle-web-5250.pdf>
- Happy Pointless National Day! <http://www.wardipedia.org/65-pointless-national-days/>
- Ideas for supporting friends, family and carers: <http://www.wardipedia.org/57-friends-relatives-and-carers/>
- Ideas and inspiration on helping patients' children to have good experiences and memories of hospital visits: <http://www.wardipedia.org/61-kids-visiting/>