

Trusted Assessors: Our journey to success

What are Trusted Assessors?

The Trusted Assessor scheme is a nationally recognised programme that is implemented in different ways throughout the engaged counties. It began as a pilot project in 2015 when Lincolnshire elected to create a Care Home Trusted Assessor role to try and address the pressures the hospital faced in having assessments completed by care homes in a timely manner. This pilot was so successful that it kick started a wave of other local authorities seeking to appoint Trusted Assessors into their own hospitals. Different counties have chosen different ways of arranging their Trusted Assessors and this is often determined by how the funding has been agreed and which organisation will be the employer; e.g., NHS, Local Authority, independent organisation.

The Trusted Assessor role has been defined as “A specific role, with the associated skills and competence, to undertake a proportionate assessment on behalf of another organisation to support a discharge from hospital to the persons next stage in their care journey” (NHS Wales, 2024).

The Trusted Assessor scheme can be interpreted differently by different organisations but in general it aims to speed up the existing discharge process to reduce delays, support timely and safe discharges, and ensure homes are receiving accurate and concise information about their residents.

The CQC guidance for Trusted Assessors states that care providers must have confidence in the Trusted Assessors ability to understand the needs of the service and must have the necessary skills and knowledge to ensure a discharge to that provider is appropriate (CQC, 2018).

How we were implemented

The Somerset Trusted Assessor (TA) journey started by initially making contact with other successful TA services throughout the country to identify their successes and downfalls.

This was followed by contacting care homes across Somerset to discuss the Trusted Assessor pilot and share our vision on how we hoped to support care homes moving forward to ensure residents discharges were timely, safe and appropriate allowing for a smooth transition back to their care home. We were very fortunate by the positive response we received from the homes we approached.

After initial conversations, we were on the road. We started by visiting all the interested homes in person allowing us to start building those critical relationships which were imperative to the success of the pilot. Giving homes an insight into what we hoped to achieve, and so they could learn more about us and our background.

We collated multiple pre-assessment forms from different care homes to allow us to devise our own before sending it back out to the homes for their approval. Homes were welcomed to opt out of receiving assessments on our paperwork, but most were accepting.

To allow us to understand how things ran within the acute hospitals we spent a day shadowing the discharge team to have an awareness of the processes and where we would best fit to enable us to obtain the most accurate information for our assessments.

The homes who engaged with our service suggested that we started by providing them with updates on their known residents in hospital. We shadowed them carrying out assessments to enable us to understand what crucial details they needed to obtain. This quickly escalated into us undertaking new assessments following the COVID-19 pandemic, as homes didn't want to put themselves or other residents within their home at risk by visiting the acute hospitals and the staffing levels did not allow them to release a staff member to attend hospital.

From completing the pilot, we found that communication was key and fundamental to the development of this role, and it was evident that homes were grateful for the support we were offering but understandably remained cautious initially. One of the key reasons that the homes were accepting of our support was due to us being employed independently via the Registered Care Providers Association, meaning that although we were based in an acute hospital we did not succumb to the influence of the NHS or the Local Authority.

How we have evolved

Due to the success of the project, the team has now expanded to allow for four Trusted Assessors, two in each of the acute hospitals in Somerset (Musgrove Park Hospital and Yeovil District Hospital). We also have support from three NHS reservist nurses who work alongside us as “bank TA’s” to support with capacity where and when needed.

We have enrolled with Bournemouth University as a registered placement for student nurses and to date we have facilitated three successful placements.

We have begun trying to support learning disability homes where possible and have had a positive meeting with the Learning Disability Liaison team at Musgrove to see how we can work together to improve outcomes for patients in hospital.

Key to our success

Some of the reasons why the service has been so successful are as follows:

- ❖ The Trusted Assessors team is comprised of qualified professionals who hold registrations with the relevant bodies and have a background in direct care, primary care and social care which empowers us to ensure that all patients we assess, receive the best outcomes and a suitable placement tailored to their needs.
- ❖ We are independently employed and therefore do not succumb to the pressures of the NHS or Social care, allowing us to provide an impartial and unbiased service. This has been our main selling point when gaining the trust of providers, as they know we are truly acting on their behalf.
- ❖ Within the team we have nominated “champions” in areas such as Safeguarding, Mental Capacity, Dementia, End of Life, etc. which ensures that as a team we stay up to date with the latest legislation and changes to practice.
- ❖ We compliment and work alongside the integrated discharge teams at the hospitals to ensure better outcomes for individuals and to increase the support to the providers.
- ❖ As mentioned previously, communication has been a key element to making this scheme as successful as it is today by fostering a great rapport with providers and other health and social care colleagues.

Key challenges and opportunities for improvement

The success of the Trusted Assessor service has not come without some challenges which we continue to embrace, to inform and improve our service. We are working as a team and with our colleagues and partners to this effect:

- ❖ To facilitate a smooth and safe discharge to homes, timely communication around decision to accept or decline from providers is paramount. This ensures that the individual's health and well-being outcomes are optimised e.g. if they are declined admission, referral to another service can be expedited and arranged, hospital stay is minimised.
- ❖ Having difficult conversations with family members and providers about their loved ones when a decision has been made by the wider MDT without NOK involvement, so they are unaware of the plan. This leads to delays and confusion.
- ❖ We often experience delays pending decision around responsibility to undertake a capacity assessment for self-funding patients to support the discharge.
- ❖ Working with the hospital teams to ensure discharges remain timely but keeping in mind that we advocate for individuals and care homes we support. It's very much a balancing act with competing priorities and this cannot be overstated.

Provider responses/ engagement

The Trusted Assessor team are always receptive to any feedback from the care providers and welcome both positive and constructive comments.

We utilise the feedback in order to adapt the service to the needs of the provider and strive to work in the most efficient way possible. We aim to flex to the needs of each home and modify the assessments on an individual basis to meet the requisites of the service. In order to enable us to have a true and clear reflection of our work for the care providers, we rely on the care providers to feedback back to us any queries, questions and outcomes for the assessments carried out to allow us to support further with links within the hospitals for a straight forward discharge.

We have welcomed care home staff to shadow us and learn how we complete our assessments. Those staff members reported that they found this opportunity really valuable for when they are assessing in the community.

As a team we regularly try to keep in touch with providers and when time allows we aim to visit the homes, especially when there are new staff members/ management.

We try as much as time permits, to engage in different events with care providers and attend relevant meetings or get together when able.

Where we want to be in 5 years

The vision for the Trusted Assessor service looking ahead, here is where we see ourselves in the next five years:

1. Expansion of Team and Services:
 - Broader coverage: We aim to expand the reach of the service to support not just care home providers. Ensuring that more individuals can benefit from timely and effective assessments.

- **Diverse care settings:** Our vision includes extending our services beyond traditional hospitals and care homes to include home care environments such as domiciliary and supported living.
- **Admission avoidance:** One way we feel we could help to prevent unnecessary hospital admissions is by ensuring that patients are assessed timely in their own homes before reaching the point of needing a social admission to Hospital. This would involve a thorough pre-admissions or reassessments of care needs and coordination with the multidisciplinary team involved to manage patient's needs effectively outside of the hospital setting.
- **Following patients from admission to discharge:** We hope to focus on a comprehensive care approach that monitors patients throughout their entire journey from admission to discharge. This would include regular assessments and reassessments to ensure that patient feel involved and that their assessments are up to date. Allow to have robust feedback mechanisms from the service users themselves about the Trusted Assessor service.

2. Enhanced Training and Development:

- **Ongoing Professional Development:** We will continue to invest in the training and professional development of Trusted Assessors, ensuring they are equipped with the latest knowledge and skills to provide high-quality assessments.
- **Specialised Training:** Specialised training programmes will be developed to address specific conditions and care needs, such as dementia care, palliative care, and complex medical needs.

The Trusted Assessor Service will continue to support care providers to enhance the quality of care and improve health outcomes for individuals across Somerset. However, realising this vision will depend significantly on securing adequate funding agreements, maintaining robust staffing levels and optimising organisational structures to support these advancements.

Summary

The Trusted Assessor service, established in 2015, plays a crucial role in expediting hospital discharge processes by providing timely and accurate assessments for individuals. Initially piloted in Lincolnshire and later adopted in Somerset, the service involves health and social care professionals employed by the Registered Care Providers Association who ensure smooth transitions from hospital to care homes. The program has successfully reduced delays, supported safe discharges, and provided care homes with significant information about their residents as can be evidenced by our capacity tracker and the quarterly reports we share without steering group and local commissioners. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the service's importance, leading to its expansion and deeper integration with hospital discharge teams.

The continuation of the Trusted Assessor service is vital due to its proven effectiveness in reducing hospital discharge delays and ensuring safe, accurate transitions to care homes. The independence and professional expertise of the assessors guarantee unbiased assessments tailored to each patient's needs. Despite facing challenges such as communication issues and bureaucratic delays, the service's adaptability and proactive engagement with care providers have demonstrated its essential

role in the healthcare system. To sustain and enhance its impact, securing adequate funding, maintaining staffing levels, and leveraging advanced technologies will be crucial moving forward.

References

CQC, 2018. Guidance: Trusted Assessors. [online] *accessed 13/06/24*

https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/20180625_900805_Guidance_on_Trusted_Assessors_agreements_v2.pdf#targetText='Trusted%20Assessor'%20schemes%20are%20a,under%20a%20formal%20written%20agreement.

NHS Wales, 2024, Guidance model 2, Trusted Assessor for hospital discharge for adults {online} *accessed 14/05/24* <https://www.nhs.wales/sa/six-goals-for-urgent-emergency-care/goal-6/goal-6-resources/trusted-assessor-for-hospital-discharge-for-adults-guidance-module-2-pdf/>