

# SUMMARY OF RESULTS

## The Discharge from Hospices Study

WARWICK

MEDICAL SCHOOL



Marie  
Curie

Care and support  
through terminal illness

**Communication of palliative needs in medical discharge letters from hospice to primary care: A multisite explanatory mixed methods study**

### What was this research about?

It is important that communication is effective and efficient when patients move between services and that patients' needs are addressed. A key example is when patients are discharged from hospice. Past work has indicated that there are communication issues, but little is known about patients who are discharged from specialist palliative care. We wanted to discover who is being discharged from hospice and why, and what needs to be improved.

### What and who was involved?

#### Recruitment and sampling

- 5 hospices in the UK screened and selected 250 hospice discharge letters (50 letters per hospice).
- 5 hospice clinicians extracted data from the 50 discharge letters from their hospice.
- 25 of the hospice staff took part in focus groups.
- Hospice staff redacted data before transferral to the research team.

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## Summary of what we found

### Analysis of discharge letters

- ✚ >90% of patients admitted for some form of symptom management, usually involving pain.
- ✚ The main reasons for discharge were patient wishes to die/for care at home and patient admitted for symptom control which has been managed.
- ✚ Most admitted patients had physical symptoms (98.4%). Some had psychological needs (46.4%) and social needs (35.6%). Spiritual needs were rarely documented (2.4%).
- ✚ There was sometimes ambiguity in “who” will be following up “what” in the discharge letters and whether described patients’ needs were resolved or ongoing for managing in the community.

### Hospice staff focus groups

- ✚ Discharge from all hospice services do not often occur. Inpatient discharge to the community team is more common.
- ✚ Patient receipt of information varies across hospices.
- ✚ Hospice clinicians thought more training and support for juniors could help improve quality of letters.

## What we recommend based on results

- ✚ Patients should be consistently offered copies of discharge letters, and this should be recorded.
- ✚ Letters should contain clear actions for primary care.
- ✚ Letters should clearly indicate whether patients’ needs are those that led to admission, those resolved during admission, or ongoing needs.
- ✚ There is a need to develop a set of national hospice-specific discharge letter principles.

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Study webpage:

[www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/hscience/apc/supportpa/llendoflife/dischargestudy/](http://www.warwick.ac.uk/fac/sci/med/research/hscience/apc/supportpa/llendoflife/dischargestudy/)

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