

Improving Service Efficiency and Quality - Issuing a Manual Tilt-In-Space Wheelchair on First Contact to Service Users

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Summary

Wheelchair therapists piloted a new way of working to improve the quality and efficiency of wheelchair provision for adult service users by fitting manual tilt-in-space wheelchairs directly at assessment if deemed clinically appropriate.

Aims and objectives

Primarily, aims were focused on improving the quality of service delivery experienced by wheelchair users across South Wales.

Proposed benefits of receiving equipment on first contact:

- Faster delivery of equipment solutions
- Improved quality of service delivery for service users
- Reduced number of clinic appointments/community visits (time and fuel savings)
- Reduced risk of development of secondary complications - subsequent financial and health related quality of life issues experienced by service users, carers and healthcare providers resulting from poor seated position.

Method

Background

When referrals indicate a manual tilt-in-space wheelchair is required, therapists list for a complex postural assessment, for which there is a waiting list. These assessments are conducted via clinic appointment or home visit due to the large geographical area covered across South and West Wales. Following assessment, the clinician would then place the order. Once the equipment was received it would be placed onto the waiting list for fitting. This process for ordering and delivery could add up to another 2-3 months onto an episode of care and results in the service user experiencing waiting times for both the assessment and issue of equipment.

Technique

In 2023, the screening process was streamlined where clinicians screened the referral and if it was deemed that a manual tilt-in-space wheelchair was likely to be suitable, an assessment was still raised but a wheelchair was also taken to the appointment and fitted if clinically appropriate on first contact.

Results and testing

During this pilot phase 98% (n=104) of service users were successfully issued a wheelchair at assessment within the 26 weeks referral to treatment key performance indicator (KPI) This is the time between point of referral to point of delivery of complex chair with a target of 90% of complex wheelchairs to be delivered within the terms of referral to treatment standards.

Following the success of this pilot, a designated stock of manual tilt-in-space wheelchairs with an agreed specification have been stored at the Posture and Mobility Centre to be

taken and issued at assessment by a therapist. This has become known as the “Grab and Go” scheme which was implemented in April 2024 and a service evaluation was undertaken in January 2025 to establish its effectiveness.

Results showed that between 1st April and 31st December 2024, 156 wheelchairs were issued at assessment/first contact. (This included 30 rapid response cases issued to service users with palliative diagnoses).

Further analysis showed that for 69% of these service users (n=108) all intervention was completed at assessment with no additional follow-up visit required.

This saved an estimated total of 151 hours of travel time - the equivalent to 4 weeks of 1 FTE post, and 5260.9 miles travelled with an estimated total average fuel cost saving of £597 (calculations based on return journeys to service users' home addresses).

The remaining 31% (n=48) of service users required additional wheelchair accessories retrofitted such as an alternative pressure redistributing cushion, or there were social /environmental barriers at time of assessment, preventing the fitting of the chair. Follow-up visits were generally allocated to Technicians.

Discussion

This process is now embedded within clinical practice with a designated storage area and stock monitored.

Benefits include:

- Equipment provision at first face-to-face contact. Saving up to 2-3 months wait for order and prevent further deterioration from unmet seating need
- Improved Referral to treatment time (KPI)
- Increased convenience for service users
- Time and fuel saving for organisation

Challenges encountered:

- Risk of 'over prescribing'.
- Storage issues
- Monitoring the supply of wheelchairs and accessories
- Additional time required at the assessment.

Future service improvement is focused on increasing the range of equipment which can be identified at referral and issued at assessment.

References

NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee (2024) Service specification: SS59, Posture and mobility services for children, young people and adults. Version 4.0. Accessed: 13/01/2025 <https://whssc.nhs.wales/commissioning/whssc-policies/all-policy-documents/posture-and-mobility-services-for-children-young-people-and-adults-service-specification-ss59-june-2024/>

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