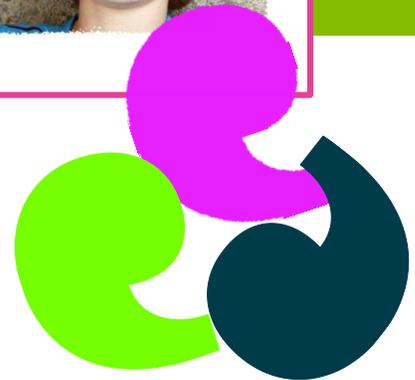




healthwatch
Somerset



AVAILABILITY OF HEARING AID BATTERIES IN BRIDGWATER

YOU SAID.....WE DID.....

Introduction

Healthwatch Somerset was contacted by the secretary for Bridgwater Senior Citizens Forum. A request for action was raised regarding the availability of hearing aid batteries in the Bridgwater area. Healthwatch Somerset was informed that hearing aid batteries were not available at local GPs and that patients were being referred to Bridgwater Community Hospital. The hospital was then informing patients that the batteries were out of stock.

You told us.....

Bridgwater Senior Citizens' Forum

Bringing pensioners together

The Bridgwater Senior Citizens' Forum told us that GP's are no longer stocking hearing aid batteries and referring patients to Bridgwater Community Hospital where again, no batteries were in stock.

This was problematic, particularly for older people, in negotiating public transport to access this.

Healthwatch Somerset had heard similar issues from members of the public in December 2015.

What we did

Healthwatch Somerset asked the audiology department at Musgrove Park Hospital, which supplies the batteries, for an explanation of the process involved in ensuring community hospitals have sufficient stock and why some GP's do not stock hearing aid batteries.

Healthwatch Somerset also contacted the Somerset CCG for a response to the issue.

Findings

The Somerset CCG gave the following response:

'We are aware that this is an issue for some patients and have in the past provided responses directly to patients and to Healthwatch about this matter.

Hearing aid batteries are currently available from the Audiology Department at Musgrove Park Hospital, six community hospitals and 15 GP Practices across Somerset. Full details about these locations are available here:

<http://tinyurl.com/jpcy9v2>

Where a patient may find they are running low on new batteries and cannot get to any of these sites, they may obtain a new pack of batteries by post.

Patients have to send their brown record book or green card to:
Audiology Department, Level 1 Duchess Building, Musgrove Park Hospital, Taunton, Somerset, TA1 5DA.

The patient is also asked to provide the postage stamp for the batteries to be posted to them by including a large letter stamp alongside their record book/green card.

In terms of why some GP's stock batteries and some don't, this is largely due to the practicalities of wider hearing aid battery distribution. Although it would not be feasible for all GP's in the county to stock the batteries, any GP Practice can opt in. Therefore, if there are particular geographical areas where this is a problem then we can look to supply batteries at local practices. If you have any further information about the location of the patients who are having this difficulty then please let us know.

If a GP or a community hospital is running low on supplies, they would re-order more batteries. Ideally, there would not be scenarios in which GP Practices or community hospitals have completely run out of batteries. It would be helpful to know if there are any particular venues where batteries are regularly out of stock so that we can identify why this might be happening.

We also asked the Audiology Department at Musgrove Park Hospital the following questions and have detailed the response below.

Why do some GP's stock hearing aid batteries and some don't?

'Batteries are supplied to Bridgwater Hospital by Musgrove staff who attend clinics there. They transport the batteries themselves when they are due to carry out an audiology clinic. Only GP's in the areas that are further away than the hospital are provided with batteries as they are harder to access for certain patients. We do not have the staff capacity nor the financial ability to provide every single GP practice in all areas we cover with batteries. The Hospitals are provided with batteries as this is where we have our open clinics and patients can drop in. Other than that we have no plan to increase the practices we supply batteries too, please understand that with the current restraint on the NHS financially we will not get approval to order more batteries.'

What is the process for making sure GP's or the community hospitals have an adequate supply?

'All GP's and hospitals have been told to inform us here at Musgrove when they are running low on stock of batteries and we can ensure they receive a new order before they run out. It can take around two weeks for orders to be delivered so they need to give us plenty of notice. They have also been told that they need to issue one pack per hearing aid, as we have had a lot of complaints from patients who have two aids and they have been told they can only have one pack. Providing we are notified in time we will ensure that all areas have batteries.'

Please can you also tell us of any plans you may have to help ensure that GPs and community hospitals have an adequate stock of batteries?

'I am in talks with Musgrove procurement to try and enable us to have stock sent directly from the supplier to our hospital etc. but at the moment this is a long process and we are unsure that it is possible due to the contracts we have set in place. As long as they let us know when they are running low we can submit an order and allow time for them to be received by us and then sent back out.'

We then asked the audiology department at Musgrove Park Hospital if the lack of stock at Bridgwater Community Hospital was likely to be due to the hospital not requesting repeat orders for new stock of batteries in a timely way. The audiology department responded by saying that the reordering phone line can at times be

very busy however the hospital can reorder via email. They also noted that they themselves had been out of stock for a short period recently and that this may have led to Bridgwater Community Hospital consequently being out of stock for a period of a few weeks.

Conclusions

Healthwatch Somerset has found that the Audiology Department do not have the capacity to staff deliveries of batteries to all GP practices. GP's and hospitals that do stock batteries should inform the audiology department at Musgrove Park hospital when they are running low. There are options for patients whose GP does not stock batteries to request batteries in the post as detailed above.

We have also found out that plans are in place to supply hospitals and GP's directly from the stockists of the batteries, however we have been informed that this is a lengthy process and likely to take time.

It is possible that the concerns regarding Bridgwater Community Hospital having no stock of hearing aid batteries may be due to a temporary supply problem however without knowing specific dates from patients who experience these problems it is difficult to determine whether this is the case.

Healthwatch Somerset hope that the information found out and detailed above in the finding section of this report, will help to inform members of the Bridgwater Senior Citizens Forum of the reasons for the difficulties that some of the members have encountered and will give options for alternative methods to require the hearing aid batteries that they need.

Next steps

Healthwatch Somerset will.....

All the feedback provided through this engagement project has been inputted to Healthwatch Somerset's Feedback Feed Forward database and will be included in the Healthwatch Somerset quarterly report. Healthwatch Somerset will be sharing this report with Healthwatch Somerset partners including Somerset Clinical Commissioning Group, the Health and Wellbeing Board, Somerset County Council, The Care Quality Commission, NHS England and Healthwatch England. The report will also be presented to the Healthwatch Somerset

Executive Group to propose further uptake of the issues identified in this report. The report will be available on the Healthwatch Somerset website (www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk) and circulated to our mailing lists via the monthly e-bulletin.

Looking forward....

Plans for future work between Healthwatch Somerset and members of the Bridgwater Senior Citizens Forum

Healthwatch Somerset welcomes and encourages members of the Bridgwater Senior Citizens Forum or those who support them to continue to contribute their feedback to us using the communication methods included at the end of this report.

Healthwatch Somerset also supports people to become volunteer champions so that they can represent the experiences and needs of their community. If you would like to find out more about volunteering with Healthwatch Somerset, please contact us using the details below.

Tell us your story...

Healthwatch Somerset want to hear from you about your experiences so that we can tell services your needs to create the best local services.



Text us - text somerset followed by your message to: 07860 021 603



Email us: info@healthwatchsomerset.co.uk



Call us: 01823 751 403



**Write to us at: Healthwatch Somerset,
c/o Somerset Rural Youth Project,
Unit 2, Suprema Estate,
Edington, Bridgwater, TA7 9LF**

Or visit our website to see more at: www.healthwatchsomerset.co.uk