

## Fact Sheet 2

### NHS Wheelchair Service

#### A Users Guide

Although Wheelchair Services throughout the NHS in the UK are funded in different ways, they all share a number of key features. This article has been written to help you make the most of your local centre.

The key factors you should look for are:

1. **Range of chairs available**
2. **Assessment and Advice Service offered**
3. **Repair and Maintenance Service offered**
4. **Speed of Delivery**

#### **1. Range of chairs available.**

If you don't visit the Wheelchair Services Assessment Centre in your area you may find it difficult to find out about the full range of chairs which the service issues. To help with the maintenance most Wheelchair Services try to keep a range for which they hold spares. If you're not happy with your current chair, or aren't sure about what you want, the best bet is to telephone the Wheelchair Service and ask for an Assessment / Advice appointment at your local clinic. If the Service comes to visit you at home or work you won't be able to see and more importantly try, the full range of chairs available.

#### **2. Assessment and advice service offered.**

The Wheelchair Service should be able to offer you an Assessment / Advice Service if you are unsure about, or have problems with the equipment you have been offered or already have on issue.

The assessment may be multi-disciplinary with a number of professional staff involved, usually including a 'rehabilitation engineer' (an engineer who specialises in wheelchairs and seating), an occupational therapist, a doctor and a physiotherapist. However, in many districts you may meet only one or two members of this team. You will usually be welcome to take an advocate, enabler/ carer, advisor or possibly another therapist with you to the assessment appointment to help you make your choice.

**The assessment should take into account both your physical and social needs, as well as the environment in which you live and work, your car etc.**

Many Wheelchair Services will have a waiting list for an assessment appointment. If your needs are not that urgent, six to eight weeks will be about as long as you should wait, although local contracts with Purchasing Authorities will govern the exact waiting time.

### **3. Repair and Maintenance Service Offered.**

All Wheelchair Services offer a comprehensive, free repair service. In England and Wales, an emergency night-time, weekend and Bank holidays service is also provided. The Repair / Maintenance Service is usually managed by a contractor (public or private sector) who has a detailed specification for the service that is required.

The service specification will vary between different Wheelchair Services and you should ask what the arrangements are in your area. At the very minimum you should be given a contact telephone number for your local Wheelchair Service Contractor.

**These Contractors used to be called Approved Repairers, but the term is no longer used.**

The Contractor should have maximum repairs times, often three days although occasionally longer, with a twenty four-hour maximum time in an emergency. Whenever possible the Contractor should be able to visit you at home, work, school, etc. Wherever is most convenient for you.

Most Contractors will be able to offer you an appointment for a visit, but many will be able to agree to a day and whether they will visit in the morning or afternoon. They will also offer you a loan chair if you're own chair has to go to their workshop for any reason. However, if your chair has been specially modified for you it may be difficult to arrange a suitable loan.

It is important to remember that the Contractors are working to a specification laid down by your local Wheelchair Service. If you feel the service is inadequate for whatever reason, you should contact the Manager at your local Wheelchair Centre for information.

### **4. Speed of Delivery.**

How long you have to wait for your Wheelchair, Cushion etc will depend upon a number of factors; -

- (a) If the chair or cushion etc. is in stock at the Wheelchair Service then you should probably only wait about ten days, often much less for delivery.
- (b) If your need for a new chair is very urgent, for whatever reason, most Services will be able to get a chair to you within 24 hours. The chair may not be ideal and might be changed at a later date, but they should be able to send you something quickly.

**(IF YOU LIVE A LONG WAY FROM YOUR WHEELCHAIR SERVICE DELIVERY MAY TAKE LONGER THAN 24 HOURS, ESPECIALLY IN THE REMOTE AREAS OF SCOTLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND).**

- (c) Some Wheelchair Services operate a waiting list system. It is always worth asking about this when you first contact the Wheelchair Service. A waiting list may mean that you have to wait up to six months for the chair you want, although this situation is quite rare and you will only be able to get details locally.

(d) Some equipment is ordered on a one-off basis from companies as required, particularly for more expensive chairs, or chairs and cushions for people with more complex difficulties. Unfortunately some wheelchair companies which make very good and useful equipment, have long delivery times.

It is not unusual for a single item of equipment suitable for an individual to be available from only one company, with a delivery time of eight to ten weeks, sometimes longer. The size of the market for some specialist equipment is so small that Wheelchair Service can be unable to provide better delivery times.

As a rule, if you are not told how long your chair will take to arrive you should ask the service, which should be able to give you a reasonable indication. If you need the chair for a special occasion or a holiday you must tell the Service as soon as possible and the staff will try to help as much as they can. **MOST WHEELCHAIR SERVICE STAFF CAN RECALL RUSHING CHAIRS ROUND TO PEOPLE FOR WEDDINGS, GRADUATIONS, ETC.**

### **Complaints and suggestions.**

If you have any suggestions or complaints to make about the Wheelchair Service in your area you should initially address your comments written or oral, to the Wheelchair Service Manager (or the equivalent title). If you are not happy about that, for whatever reason, you should contact the Chief Executive of the PCT, or the General Manager if your service is not the part of a trust, and make a formal complaint through that office. Alternatively you could complain to the District Health Authority (Area Health Board in Scotland) which purchases the service for people living in your area. If you live in Wales, you should contact the Wheelchair Services Manager of the ALAC Division of the Welsh Health Common Services Authorities and failing that, its Chief Executive. You will find the telephone number and addresses through your telephone directory, the local library or local disability information service.

**Many Disability Organisations like the Disabled Living Foundation (DLF), RADAR, SPINAL INJURIES ASSOCIATION (SIA) and the WHEELCHAIR USERS GROUP provide fact sheets and information on equipment including wheelchairs.**