

# E-Health Insider

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## E-referral system aims to cut discharge delays

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An electronic e-referral system that helps cut discharge delays has been extended to cover patients moving from the Countess of Chester Hospital in Cheshire to the care of Flintshire Social Services, North Wales.

The new link will enable nurses at the hospital to inform Flintshire staff round-the-clock about patients being referred for social care. Previously nurses had to telephone or fax Flintshire Social Services; now details of patient requirements can be sent electronically.

The system, supplied by Medisec, has helped the hospital cut delayed discharge days dramatically for patients living on the English side of the nearby national boundary who are being referred to Cheshire Social Services.

An evaluation of the Cheshire implementation showed that delayed discharges had dropped by more than half since the system was installed in 2004.

Staff are hopeful of repeating the success. Pat Roberts, discharge liaison team leader at the Countess of Chester Hospital NHS Foundation Trust said: "Before, the nurses would have to use a separate paper-based discharge system for Flintshire patients; now we can standardise the whole discharge liaison process across the hospital.

"It's a very slick system. We can issue notices to social services and check up on the status of patients at the touch of a button, so it's certainly helped us to cut down on a lot of time-consuming phone calls.

"We can also tell how many patients from Flintshire are in the hospital at any given time - which helps social services teams manage caseloads."

The development was announced at HC2007 where Medisec's development director, Kevin Buckley, told E-Health Insider the overall aim of the firm's system, which also covers GP/hospital communications, was to improve clinical correspondence.

"It's amazing how much correspondence goes missing," he said.

For the Flintshire e-referrals Medisec system pulls data off the hospital's patient administration system ensuring that data is consistent and accurate. Staff can also track correspondence from the point of creation and measure performance.

Medisec involved local Caldicott guardians in the development of a protocol to ensure patients have given consent for their information to be shared with social services. Other safeguards in the system ensure that social care staff know whether next-of-kin have been informed about a patients death

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