



Open Letter from the Adult Principal Social Worker Network

To the Right Honourable Stephen Barclay, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care and Helen Whately, Minister of State for Social Care,

The Adult Principal Social Work Network, as a body representing over 150 local authority PSWs, wish to write to express concern and a desire to be proactively involved in supporting the NHS to improve peoples' experiences of hospital discharge.

A Principal Social Worker was sitting at a bus stop recently waiting for her bus to work. Someone came and sat next to her and shared that she had recently returned home after a very stressful and frightening few months. She had been taken from her home and moved from one place to another, not knowing where she was or how, when or if she would ever get home. The Social Worker asked her what had happened, she said "I had a fall and ended up in hospital, and from there I couldn't even tell you where I ended up..."

Social Workers have a long history of working within hospitals and are skilled at working alongside people, supporting their strengths and abilities, wishes, feelings, hopes and aspirations. We assess complex legally and ethically challenging areas of people's lives to do with their physical and mental health and wellbeing, relationships, mental capacity, risks, abuse and neglect. We find out about people's home circumstances, whether they can pay for heating, get their shopping, whether they have a community of friends who will rally around them, or whether they are lonely at home alone. All these things matter when someone returns home from hospital, if they are to keep safe, well and out of hospital in the future. Social Workers safeguard people's human rights, ensure that they have choice and control about decisions around their lives, and a meaningful quality of life. This is where social work really matters.

As Principal Social Workers, we have a key role in upholding human rights, ensuring respect and social justice for all members of society, and representing our profession. We are concerned that people leaving hospital are ending up in the wrong places, with the wrong support, away from the people and things that are important to them which means they are at increased risk of a slower recovery and a potential unnecessary return to hospital. We include with this letter, an infographic which tells one such story.

We are writing as the national network of Adult PSWs to advocate the need for policymakers to focus on outcomes and the voice of those with lived experience is heard. We count successes by positive outcomes for people rather than beds in hospitals. We know that people are able to remain independent for longer and have a better quality of life when they can return to their own homes. A social work assessment is key to ensuring that a person gets to the right place for them, with the support that they need.

Our concerns are much broader than the market issues, where precious space in social care provision is being bought at higher prices by the NHS. Failing to properly understand someone's needs, home life, wishes and feelings means that people are being moved to hotel rooms or care homes they don't need to be in, or returning home, often at risk, without the right support in place. Both of these are poor value in terms of financial cost but more importantly, they actively disable the person's recovery and wellness. We know that the absence of social work assessments is increasing stress for care providers who have inadequate information for their care plans, causing trauma for carers and families who are not involved as they should be in decision-making and who end up picking up the pieces from our broken system.

Our membership wants to supportively challenge and work with the government and NHS to change people's experiences of the current discharge process which sees vulnerable people being transferred in a medically optimised state into care homes when we know people recover best in their own homes surrounded by their networks and community. To this end, the PSW Network would welcome a conversation about how to get Social Workers more meaningfully involved in discharge planning whilst simultaneously ensuring that our already

pressured practitioners and community teams can continue to meet the rising demand and complexity of need in people's lives, in the face of the cost of living crisis.

This is about you, me and the people you care about. We know the difference a Social Worker can make and ask that social work is included again in early conversations and assessment with people so that they can find the right pathway to lasting recovery.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah Range". The script is cursive and fluid.

Sarah Range

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Hannah Scaife". The script is cursive and fluid.

Hannah Scaife

Co-Chairs of the Adult Principal Social Worker Network