

HOMELESS AND SICK. NOW WHAT?

Helping our most vulnerable patients

No home address, no ID, no formal support network and in need of care for a complex mix of physical and mental problems: our emergency department at University College Hospital is often a starting point for many rough sleepers seeking care. Around 500 homeless people are admitted to our wards each year. Many are misusing alcohol or drugs, living in poverty and often with undiagnosed mental health issues. Others can be asylum seekers or victims of modern slavery.

The homeless pathway team, founded at UCLH ten years ago, is forging stronger links with a network of community groups. We share a common goal: to help people rebuild their lives away from the harsh reality of the streets.

“We want to make sure every rough sleeper gets the right support from the right service, in the right place, at the right time at UCLH and when they leave,” said Claire McGinley, integrated care manager.

UCLH HOMELESS PATHWAY TEAM

Every patient who is admitted is asked whether they have somewhere safe to go when they leave hospital. If not, ward staff contact the pathway team. Many rough sleepers are treated for skin infections, abscesses, head injuries, liver disease, gastrointestinal bleeding, chest infections, hepatitis C, cancers, and alcohol and drug withdrawal.

“We go to the bedside, find out about their medical needs. We also delve into what has happened in their life, why they have become homeless and what might help them now,” said Dr Tim Robson, clinical lead. “We use the crisis of hospital admission to try to draw out from patients exactly what they think the next step might be to improve their lot. For example, I might provide detailed medical information to housing agencies.” Tim works closely with Florence Cumberbatch, clinical nurse specialist who says “showing patients kindness, compassion and dignity” is an important part of her work.

Josie Mavromatis and Julian Daley, care navigators, offer befriending support, as well as practical help such as organising ID and benefit claims. They also escort patients to housing appointments. Both have experienced homelessness in their lives. “We can really empathise. We really do understand the challenges they face.”



Photo caption (L-R): Claire McGinley, Sibio Sesay, Josie Mavromatis, Pav

Sibio Sesay is a clinical nurse specialist who links UCLH and community services. What is her aim? To make sure patients have a safe place to go when they leave hospital and have as much support as possible to keep them out of hospital and off the streets.

THANK YOU!

With support from UCLH Charity we can offer patients fresh supplies of clothing or a travel card. One patient said he wanted to return to his family, so we arranged his coach journey back to his home town. Often simple, practical things can help make a difference to support our work.



Pawel Zabielski, Oyinka Akinseye, Lena Nzenwa, Miguel Neves

HOW YOU CAN HELP

If you are concerned about a rough sleeper in Camden call the hotline: 020 7846 3535 / 0808 800 0005 (freephone).

Alternatively you can download the Camden StreetSafe app from camdenrts.co.uk.

WHO DO WE WORK WITH?

UCLH works closely with Camden Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Camden Health Improvement Practice (CHIP), Camden Council and the voluntary sector, with positive results.

The number of rough sleepers has fallen by around 50 per cent in Camden in the past year, according to regular street counts.

Camden Council has commissioned Routes off The Streets (RTS) to help people get the support they need. RTS, based in Camden Town, offers a range of services under one roof. This includes access to nurses such as Oyinka Akinseye who can help with mental and physical health problems and refer people to specialist drug and alcohol agencies. Rough sleepers can also get legal and benefits advice, as well as hot meals and shower facilities. The RTS outreach team work on the streets of Camden every day to reach vulnerable rough sleepers and offer services to them. Housing officer Leena Nzenwa specialises in finding rough sleepers a place to live: 144 rough sleepers moved into accommodation from April to September 2019, up from 115 over the same period the previous year.

Around 700 homeless people are registered at the Camden Health Improvement Practice, a primary health care surgery. It offers general GP care, advice on mental and sexual health issues, substance misuse, the prevention and treatment of leg ulcers, HIV and other blood borne viruses. There are weekly women only clinics and citizens' advice sessions.

Saint John of God Hospitaller Services is an international charity which manages Olallo House, a hostel just a few minutes from the hospital. It means nurses can continue to assess patients in the community. Miguel Neves (pictured with colleague Pawel Zabielski) said: "We offer people a safe and warm place to fully recover after hospital treatment. We have 34 very nice bedrooms. We don't just wave goodbye when they are feeling better, we offer pastoral and practical support at every stage in their journey."