

Transforming Community Equipment Services (TCES):

Equipment For Daily Living

The London Borough of Lambeth and NHS Lambeth are preparing to implement a new prescription system for simple pieces of community equipment under £100. Recent consultation with service users through a questionnaire and focus group has provided very positive feedback and this has been used to develop the model locally.

Simple equipment for daily living, such as eating and drinking utensils, grab rails and raised toilet seats help millions of people to live more independently in their own homes.

Over the last two years, the TCES retail model has been developed and trialled around the country, bringing together local social care and health teams with equipment retailers, collaborating to benefit people who need simple aids to daily living. The programme forms an important element of health and social care policy helping to give independence, choice and control to both state funded and self funding service users.

Equipment needs are assessed by Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists and Community Nurses, either on discharge from hospital through NHS services or through local authority social services. Currently, the assessor requisitions any necessary equipment, usually from a local authority equipment store, from simple aids such as walking sticks and loo seats to more complex equipment such as hoists and beds and the equipment is issued, on loan, to the user. When no longer needed, the equipment is collected, reconditioned and passed on to the next person.

The new retail model - a prescription service for simple equipment

In the future, as part of the drive for more personalised services, assessors will be able to issue prescriptions for simple items of equipment which can then be exchanged for products at 'accredited retailers' - rather like a doctor's prescription for medicines or an optician's prescription for spectacles.

Complex or bespoke equipment such as beds, hoists and lifts will continue to be supplied and collected after use through the current system.

A national catalogue for simple equipment has been agreed listing the approved products and prices, as part of the reimbursement contract between the state and accredited retailers.

Greater choice and control for service users

Under the new system, after the normal assessment, state-funded users can choose where to redeem their prescription, taking the time to look and try out a range of suitable products in the shop before taking them home.

If the equipment is bulky, needs installation or if the person can't get to a retailer, the assessor can prescribe delivery. In each case, the equipment is supplied new, for the owner to use and to keep.

If they wish they can make a top-up payment for a product that better suits their lifestyle. This may be priced at a higher cost than the prescription and the individual then pays the difference to the retailer.

No change to needs assessment

The retail model does not change the way a person is assessed, or change their eligibility for state funding. What changes is a greater emphasis on the practitioner and user agreeing needs and preferences, allowing the user then to take control of their own prescription.

Practitioners play a key role in supporting individuals to maintain their independence and well being. The assessment process considers all aspects of an individual's functional needs and a practitioner may recommend treatments, support packages or adaptations of premises as well as equipment. The retail model for simple equipment provides increased scope to support and enable users through advice, information and advocacy.

Opening up the market for community equipment

Until now, the marketplace for community equipment has been dominated by public supply systems. Instead of a state-managed supply, the new system allows accredited retailers to supply a choice of state-funded equipment for those supported by the state. It is a change that, like the market for spectacles before it, opens up real potential for transformation through competition, market expansion, better product development and design.

Whilst the decision to adopt the prescription process for state funded users is being taken locally, the retail market has not been slow to spot the opportunities offered by a growing market for equipment and mobility aids. To answer the demand for choice and availability, ranges of equipment are now being stocked by some major high street retailers, as well as by existing independent retailers.

Lambeth is planning to issue their first prescription in May 2010.