

The heart failure virtual ward

What is heart failure?

Heart Failure (HF) is a condition where the heart is not able to pump enough blood around the body. This can lead to fluid build-up in the body and symptoms can include shortness of breath and swelling in the ankles, legs or tummy.

What is the heart failure virtual ward?

After starting treatment in hospital, many patients with HF can then be cared for safely and more comfortably at home. The doctors looking after you have referred you for assessment by the 'ESD Virtual Ward Service'. This service provides care for patients safely at home for two weeks after leaving hospital.

The aim of the virtual ward is to allow patients who have come into hospital with HF to return home sooner than previously possible, but with the support of the specialist virtual ward team who will contact you regularly by telephone. You are still under the care of a specialist team at hospital who will have given you information about your condition, its treatment and their own contact information.

As part of the virtual ward, you will be asked to use an app on your phone to send us daily information on your blood pressure, heart rate and weight. The hospital team will help set this up and show you how to use the equipment before you leave the hospital. The virtual ward team will also provide ongoing support for using this app and monitoring devices.

What happens next?

You will have been assessed in hospital by a HF specialist nurse and doctors. They will recommend the care they feel is best suited for you, including what is to be provided for you when you go home. This will include:

- Medication to help with heart function (and instructions)
- Treatment to reduce breathlessness and ankle/leg swelling
- Regular checks by a team of nurses who will contact you as necessary
- Devices to monitor your heart rate, blood pressure and weight
- Information on HF
- A copy of your notes for you to keep at home
- A patient satisfaction questionnaire
- A follow up clinic appointment with the HF team.

The day you go home or the day after that you may be offered a virtual assessment by one of the nurses from the team who will monitor your progress.

For the first five days after you go home you will receive phone calls daily or more than once a day.

For up to 14 days, you will be monitored and/or called. Your case will be discussed with the HF specialist team as needed. If you don't feel better or need to go back to hospital, then this will be arranged.

The specialist nurses can also offer you support and advice about your HF treatment. If you have ANY questions, then please ask.

What do I do if I feel worse?

- While you are under the care of the virtual ward team, you can speak to one of the nurses if you have any questions or problems. They are available between 9am and 7pm on 0203 704 3704. After 7pm the Out of Hours GP service will be available to help you if needed via 111.
- While you are under the care of the virtual ward team you will remain under the care of the hospital consultant. If you do come back into hospital, please bring all documents given to you by the virtual ward team.

Contact numbers

If you or your family/carers have any concerns or questions regarding your current health please contact:

The Virtual ward team from 9am-7pm: 0203 704 3704

The Out of Hours Service after 7pm: 111

If you feel progressively unwell, more short-of-breath, or have chest pain, ring for an ambulance on 999. Please try to remember to take the medical notes and documents that you have at home with you to hospital.

What happens after the 14 days or less of monitoring?

If you have been stable, you will no longer be part of the virtual ward, and will be referred to the outpatient specialist team. This is where you'll be given appointments that don't need an overnight stay. A follow-up appointment will be made for you in the heart failure nursing and/or doctor team. You will be given a heart failure management plan that explains how to recognise the early warning signs of things getting worse, and how best for you to manage it. You will be given the telephone number of the team to ring them if there are any problems.

If you have not been stable, then you may be asked to continue on the virtual ward for a little while longer.

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have. If you have any suggestions or comments about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (PALS) on 020 3312 7777 (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday). You can also email PALS at imperial.pals@nhs.net The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department: Complaints department, fourth floor, Salton House, St Mary's Hospital, Praed Street, London W2 1NY
Email: ICHC-tr.Complaints@nhs.net or Telephone: 020 3312 1337 / 1349

Alternative formats

This leaflet can be provided on request in large print or easy read, as a sound recording, in Braille or in alternative languages. Please email the communications team:
imperial.communications@nhs.net

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