



Hospital Treatment Guidelines FACT SHEET

Residents in residential aged care home often develop new or worsening symptoms. When this occurs, a decision may be needed about whether to continue care in Te Hopai or go to a hospital.

Because there are risks as well as benefits of care in a hospital, it is important to make the right decision. The decision depends on a number of factors, including the risks versus benefits of hospital care and how the resident and her or his relatives view the benefits and risks of care in the hospital as opposed to the residential care home.

Research has shown that some hospitalisations may be unnecessary. Whether hospitalisation can be prevented depends on the resident's condition, the ability of the staff to provide the care necessary in the residential care home, and the preferences of the resident and her or his family. Along with this, often the resident's condition dictates that nothing can be done of benefit for the person in a public hospital, and so they are discharged back to the residential care home anyway, having had to endure a lengthy wait in the emergency department. There are both benefits and risks to hospital care and these are outlined below.

Benefits of hospital care

There are many symptoms and conditions that usually require treatment in the hospital – for example, if vital signs are very abnormal (temperature, heart rate or breathing rate), or if symptoms are severe and can't be controlled (such as pain or vomiting). Hospital care offers benefits in these situations, including:

- Ready availability of sophisticated lab tests, X-rays and scans
- Access to doctors and specialists who are in the hospital every day
- Availability of surgery and other procedures if needed
- Intensive care units for people who are critically ill

Risks of hospital care

Residents in the residential aged care are prone to many complications of care in a hospital. These complications may occur even in the best of hospitals, because older age, chronic medical conditions, and the condition that caused the transfer all combine with the hospital environment to put residential care home residents at high risk for complications. These complications include;

- New or worsening confusion leading to delirium, which may become permanent
- More time spent in bed, which can increase the risk of blood clots, pressure ulcers, muscle weakness, loss of function (which may become permanent) and other complications
- Less sleep and rest due to tests, monitoring and noise
- Weight loss if the person cannot feed themselves

- Increased risk for:
 - falls with injuries
 - new infections, some of which may be multi-resistant organisms and hard to treat
 - depression due to limited opportunities to socialise with friends and family, as well as being in an unfamiliar environment

Benefits of staying in the nursing home

There are benefits of staying in the residential care home when a new symptom or condition occurs – assuming it is safe to treat the condition in the residential care home. Treatment here allows residents to:

- Have continuity of care – this means that residents continue to receive care from staff members who know them, and who are able to respond to their individual preferences and needs
- Remain in a familiar environment with their personal possessions, and keep their individual routines as much as possible
- Avoid what is often an uncomfortable trip to the hospital and long delays waiting in the emergency department
- Avoid potential problems due to miscommunication between the hospital and the residential care home
- Avoid other hospital related complications
- Continue to receive care from the nursing and medical staff who are familiar with their condition, their past medical history and their medication regime

Making the right decision

There are several things that residents and families can do to ensure that they make the right decisions about hospital care:

- Participate in care planning and treatment decisions with the staff and GP
- Discuss the risks and benefits of a hospital transfer vs. treatment in residential care home when a new symptom or condition is recognised
- Complete an advance directive and ensure that an Enduring Power of Attorney is in place for when the resident can no longer make decisions for themselves
- Understanding the resources that Te Hopai can offer (we have a form to help with this)
- Realising that after 21 days in hospital the residents bed will no longer be held unless they begin privately paying for it, unless an extension is applied for and granted
- Understand the reasons why hospital is sometimes not the right place for an older adult, especially if they are at the end of life