

14 August 2025

District Nursing Service Policies and Procedures

Under the Freedom of Information Act, I request the following documents / information from Belfast Health and Social Care Trust.

Current policies, procedures or guidelines on:

1. Rescheduling of an appointment, communication between the District Nurse and the patient / carer, and how they are to be notified.

District Nursing appointments are scheduled through the Encompass system.

Communication with the patient / family is dependent on the situation, i.e. discharge from hospital or if the patient is active on a District Nursing caseload. If it is a discharge from hospital, the hospital staff will advise the patient that the District Nursing Service has been contacted and when they can expect the District Nursing Service to call.

The District Nursing Service triages all referrals, and appointments are scheduled depending on the patient's needs. Where there are any queries regarding specific referral dates, District Nursing will make contact with the referral professional to clarify the referral request.

When the District Nurse visits and completes a nursing assessment, if there is a requirement for ongoing care, the District Nurse will discuss a call schedule with the patient or family; for example, plan a visit 2 or 3 times a week. This is based on the nurse carrying out a patient assessed need. The patient / family are generally advised of the day but, due to the nature of the service, no specific times are provided. The exception to this is time critical medication, for example, insulin administration in the morning or evening or patients who are end of life and receiving medication via a syringe pump.

If the patient is active on the District Nursing caseload, again, the frequency of visit and visit schedule is based on the Nurse's assessment of the patients assessed needs and this is generally discussed and arranged with the patient or family. Due to the nature of the service, patient calls are prioritised and scheduled based on the patient's assessed need and urgency, for example, patients requiring pain relief for end of life care receive priority.

It is important to note that there are occasions when the District Nursing Service does not accept a referral as it may be deemed inappropriate or does not meet the referral criteria.

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2. Discharge of patients from the District Nurse Services, as well as being discharged without assessment if patient was discharged via phone with family member.

Patients are discharged from the service based on the nursing assessment and the individual assessed need. The patient is informed when the District Nursing Service intervention has been completed.

3. District nursing staff refusing GP referrals or overriding a GPs clinical decision regarding patient eligibility and treatment

The District Nursing Service is independent of the GP and the eligibility to receive the District Nursing Service is based on the District Nursing Assessment and the patient need.

The District Nursing Service has a regionally agreed referral criteria. Referral criteria attached in separate document.

4. Eligibility criteria for access to the District Nursing Services, including any internal definitions or interpretations of the term “housebound” and criteria - I would also like to know the legal definition of “housebound “ used by the Department, if there is one

As above, regionally agreed criteria is attached.

Patients are deemed “housebound” when they are unable to leave their home.

5. Any documents outlining how disputes about eligibility or service discharge are handled within the Trust.

Disputes about the District Nursing Service eligibility criteria are generally resolved through local patient resolution or through the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust Complaints Procedure.

6. Can a District Nurse change an appointment and arrive when she likes and enter the patient’s home unannounced? I’m seeking this clarification given the distress this could cause a patient having an unexpected person calling to their home

District Nurses are aware of the importance of respecting patient’s privacy in the patient’s own home.

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Due to the nature of the service, there may be occasions when patient appointments need changed because of increased demands on the service

The service will always investigate any concerns about a specific patient's experience, when these are raised direct with the service or via the Trust's Complaints Procedure.