



Investigation focus: Investigation into the Care and Management of a Consumer with Complex Needs in an Acute Care Setting

Wider learnings

The investigation has underscored the significant complexities involved in delivering care to consumers with substantial neurodevelopmental and behavioural needs within acute care settings. While the Hospital and Health Service (HHS) demonstrated a commendable commitment to addressing these challenges, it is evident that broader systemic reforms are required to uphold the rights, safety, and dignity of these vulnerable individuals. Achieving sustainable improvements in care and support for consumers with complex needs will necessitate ongoing collaboration across the health, disability, and government sectors. The investigation also identified systemic challenges that extend beyond the remit of the HHS, highlighting the need for coordinated, statewide action. These challenges include:

- **Legislative Reform:** Consideration toward development and implementation of a comprehensive statewide framework to authorise and regulate the use of restrictive practices in acute care settings.
- **Community-Based Care Options:** The investigation revealed a critical gap in the availability of suitable alternative care environments for consumers with complex needs. The lack of community-based care options contributes to prolonged hospitalisations, which can adversely impact both the individual and the broader health system.
- **Interagency Coordination:** Enhanced collaboration between the health, disability, and community sectors is essential to address systemic gaps in care delivery and discharge pathways. Strengthened interagency coordination will be pivotal in ensuring seamless transitions and comprehensive support for consumers.

Background

The Office of the Health Ombudsman (OHO) initiated a systemic investigation in response to a complaint regarding the care provided to a 20-year-old individual admitted to an acute care service after the breakdown of her community-based accommodation and care arrangements. The complaint raised concerns about the use of restrictive practices, potential breaches of privacy, and the effectiveness of behavioural and security management strategies implemented for the consumer.

In addition to examining the specific circumstances of this case, the investigation also explored broader systemic issues. This included the limited availability of suitable community-based care options and the absence of a statewide framework to regulate and authorise the use of restrictive practices in acute care settings.

Issues investigated

The investigation focused on:

1. **Restrictive Practices** – Compliance, proportionality, trauma-informed care, and monitoring.
2. **Staff Capability** – Training in de-escalation and ethical practices.
3. **Management Strategies** – Effectiveness of behaviour and security planning, and Protective Service Officer training.
4. **Care Environment** – Suitability of settings for persons with complex neurodevelopmental and behavioural needs.
5. **Systemic Issues** – Legislative gaps, lack of community care options, and discharge pathway challenges.



Key findings

Strengths

- **Collaborative Care:** A multidisciplinary approach was adopted, prioritising the safety and wellbeing of the consumer despite the inherent challenges of delivering long-term care within a hospital setting.
- **Environmental Modifications:** Dedicated spaces were established, supported by one-to-one nursing care and security measures to ensure a safe and supportive environment for the consumer.
- **Specialist Expertise:** Psychological and behavioural interventions were guided by specialist expertise, complemented by proactive medication management aimed at minimising the need for emergency interventions.
- **Discharge Planning:** Coordinated efforts were made to facilitate the consumer's transition to a more appropriate community-based care environment, reflecting a commitment to long-term, sustainable care solutions.

Issues Identified

- **Restrictive Practices:** Inconsistent application of policies and procedures, with insufficient documentation to justify the use of restrictive practices on all occasions. Some instances of restraint techniques were found to be non-compliant with best practice standards.
- **Behaviour Support Plans:** Behaviour Support Plans were assessed as being reactive rather than proactive, and would benefit from an expanded trauma-informed approach with regular reviews to ensure they meet the evolving needs of the consumer.
- **Security Management:** A need for further consideration toward consumer wellbeing and privacy, alongside identified gaps in the training of Protective Services Officers, particularly in the areas of restraint techniques and de-escalation strategies.

Quality Improvement and Ongoing Initiatives

Since the consumer's admission, the HHS has introduced substantial service enhancements, updated policies and procedures, and implemented targeted education and training strategies. These efforts are ongoing and will address the identified issues within the HHS's remit.

The Queensland Government, in collaboration with the Federal Government, has also undertaken initiatives to address systemic challenges, including:

- Improving discharge pathways for long-stay patients in public hospitals.
- Increasing access to aged care and NDIS-supported accommodation.
- Developing a *Restrictive Practices Health Service Directive and Guideline* to reduce restrictive practices, promote trauma-informed care, and ensure compliance with the *Human Rights Act 2019 (Qld)*.