

Examples:

One person wrote a in-depth long letter to herself, which was opened during a care review. She felt so low and disconnected from recovery that she was unable to find the words to speak or explain but as the the letter was read she began to cry. She fought it initially then allowed herself to hear the words she wanted herself to hear if readmitted. It proved very powerful and opened up her thinking and staff could reengage her on the recovery journey again.

Another patient chose to write a poem, this was very effective as she recognised the words straightaway. It was like jump starting her recovery journey following readmission.

Letters can take any creative form, either on paper with pen or paint and even digital in the form of an email or voice recording.

Quotes from staff:

This reconnects patients to a part of them which is lost when relapse takes over.

This allows hope, at a time in recovery when it can easily be lost.

Acknowledgement:

Rebecca Thorogood on Oak 1, Cavell Centre, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust started the Letter for Later initiative.

Letter for Later

Theme: Reflective Space

Objective:

Our objective is to bridge the gap between the hope and positivity that people feel when they are on the upward trajectory coming up to discharge and the negative emotions they can experience if they need readmission due to a relapse of their mental health struggles.

Concept:

Recovery isn't always easy or straight forward and there may be set backs over the course of the journey. During these times individuals can feel very despondent and dispirited. They may not be able to identify with their achievements or recognise their strengths. People sometimes begin to fear they will never be well again, which is intensely frightening and often leads to an overwhelming sense hopelessness. They might struggle to remember how in the past they had managed to scale up the mountain side from the valley of desolation. As nurses we hold hope for patients and reflect back our memories of their optimism, but it is far less powerful than reading about the hope they experienced when it's been written in their own words. Their description of recovery and how they went about the uphill journey successfully in the past is a powerful tool and provides a tangible reminder of the positivity they once experienced.

Pragmatics:

Supported by staff on the ward, patients write a letter to their future



Time: 

Cost: 

Training: 

Staff: 

Quick Win: 

self about the journey they have been on and how far they have come. The letter is filed safely away on the ward and is handed to the author if they are readmitted. It is either given in a 1:1 session or alternatively at a care review. The letter serves as an anchor to reconnect that person to a more positive space and instil a sense optimism. This idea is simple, it requires little in terms of resource and simply needs a safe storage to keep the personal letters.

Top Tip:

Provide support and encourage honesty. People may need assistance to help them to capture how they are feeling at the point of discharge, how they have recovered so far and to think about their goals and aspirations.



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Letter for Later

Ready Reckoner

Explain purpose

- Recovery has its ups and downs
- Hope for the best, be prepared for the worst
- Chance favours the prepared minds
- Use anonymous examples to explain how such a letter might help

Remain Mindful

- Hope at discharge is not a universal feeling
- Anxiety many patients experience at discharge may overshadow the hope of a new beginning
- Discharge brings out feelings of rejection and abandonment in some
- Strike a balance between the desire to be positive and acknowledging the challenges on the road ahead

Guide Reflection

- Prepare, prepare, prepare
- Know the person, not just the patient
- Encourage open honest discussion
- Discuss achievements and how one overcame the hurdles
- Take time, do not rush
- In their own words, not yours

The prompts are for staff. They should facilitate dialogue and start the process of reflection. Each individual is different and on explaining the goal of what we are trying to achieve through the letter, the professional can exercise judgement to provide space and not stifle the person's creativity or engage in reflection together. The prompts are also meant to help the professional prepare for the 1 to 1 session. It is preferable for the named nurse/key worker on the ward to engage in the process as they will have in depth knowledge of the hopes and aspirations and challenges. Even 15 minutes of mindful reflection on potential answers to these prompts prior to the meeting would qualitatively shift the nature of the dialogue. In the meeting the practitioner will get a sense check of how well they know the person and over time 'Letter for Later' will help them develop as empathic clinicians as well.

How are you feeling now? (Encourage open and honest reflection, let not your desire to be positive stifle other emotions the person might be feeling)

Notes:

How far have you come? (Reflect on the progress starting from low point at admission)

Notes:

What helped you get here? (Inner resources and external support)

Notes:

What would you keep moving forward? (Predict challenges and how to overcome)

Notes:

What would you want to tell yourself if there was a set-back?

Notes: