

## Give me a voice: Mr H

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The following is a reflection written by Christina Machattou, physiotherapist for local Kingston healthcare provider, Your Healthcare ([www.yourhealthcare.org](http://www.yourhealthcare.org)).

Inspired by the Bridges training on self-management, Christina describes how a relatively small service change by the community neuro rehabilitation team, has made a positive difference in a patient's rehabilitation experience.

Our patient will be called 'Mr H' for confidential reasons

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### What Happened?

Mr H has been one of the most motivated people I have met as a physiotherapist. Mr H is a stroke survivor, who has never given up on achieving his desired goal, which is being able to walk.

Something we take for granted.

However, Mr H was unable to express his goals during the rehabilitation process, due to his severe communication difficulties as a result of his stroke.

Physiotherapists have been taught that goals need to be set with all of our patients, in order to motivate them.

However, this was not the case for Mr H.

His expressive difficulties were perceived as a barrier to being able to set his own goals. For this reason no goals were set and instead as therapists we all perceived that we knew what he wanted.

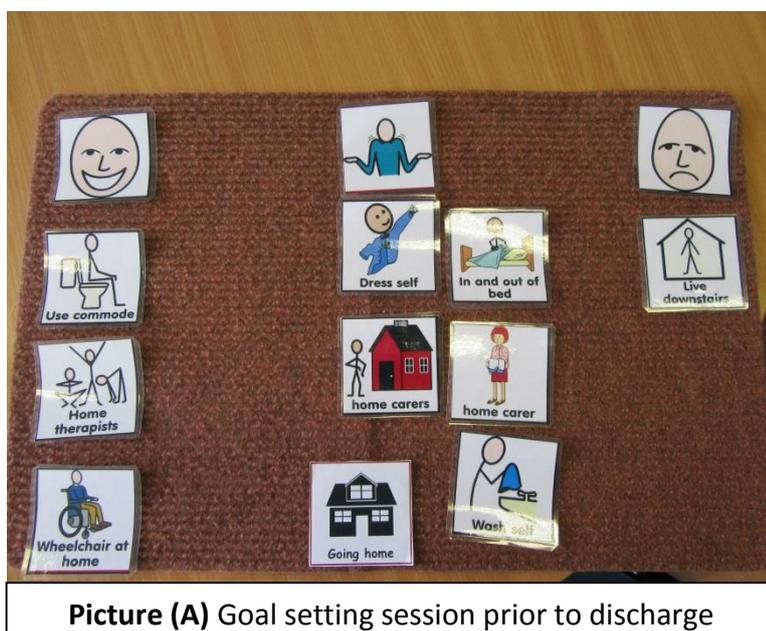
### The need for a change:

However, just before the patient was discharged, Mr H's mood suddenly changed. A nurse reported he did not want to participate with any rehab activities and seemed very angry. Knowing Mr H well, I knew something was wrong. Then again Mr H was unable to explain what worried him.

### What can I do to help?

An idea came into my mind and through team work with the speech and language therapists (Nisreen Fansa) we found a solution. We used Talking mats during a joint speech and physiotherapy goal setting session. Talking mats are communication symbols tool, based on extensive research and designed by speech and language therapists.

The communication symbols used during the goal setting session were related to the rehabilitation activities we were working towards prior and on discharge. We also involved the wife during the session and asked Mr H to simply place these symbol activities in three categories: *Happy*, *Unsure* and *unhappy*: see picture below:



**Picture (A)** Goal setting session prior to discharge

Please see the website below for more details on talking mats and their use:

<http://www.talkingmats.com/>

### **A small change, a big difference:**

Making this small change helped us understand what worried Mr H, which was having help for personal care from carers when discharged home. Knowing this we came with another solution, which was to involve the carers in Mr H's care prior to discharge. This gave Mr H a chance to meet the carers and feel in control over his own care. Moreover, doing so also helped us discover the things Mr H was happy with, which was therapists continuing rehab at home. In addition we also found out that Mr H was unhappy with living downstairs, because he wanted to be able to walk before he went home. Walking was his biggest goal and one he is still fighting for, but at least we know now (see picture A).

### **What we learned as a team:**

Our service has further updated its goal setting guidelines for people with communication difficulties. The new guideline is for talking mats to be used during goal setting sessions in order to provide people with communication difficulties a chance to express their goals, worries and needs.

Talking mats could facilitate people with communication difficulties such as stroke survivors, people with dementia or with learning disabilities to communicate their needs, goals or worries just by using a set of picture symbols.

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In just a few words “empowerment back to where it belongs”.

“Let's make a small change, let's give people with communication difficulties such as Mr H a voice”.