

Serious Incident Review summary - Geoff

Geoff was aged 57, and lived alone in a ground floor flat rented from a social landlord. He had numerous health problems including COPD, diabetes resulting in amputation of toes on both feet and very limited mobility. He had shown symptoms of personality disorder and had depression and suicidal thoughts. He was a smoker and had been a heavy drinker for many years. He was prescribed long term oxygen therapy at home in August 2019 following an admission to hospital. Questions on the order form and risk mitigation form for home oxygen about smoking and history of drug or alcohol dependency were mistakenly answered inaccurately.

Geoff continued to smoke despite being advised by several professionals about the dangers of doing so. Following discharge from hospital he was in receipt of a short term reablement package and was being assessed for longer term care, although had fallen out with carers and cancelled packages in the past. He was re-admitted to hospital for two days in early September and closed to Adult Social Care, who were not aware of his discharge from hospital 6 days before the fire incident. He had received two Safe and Well visits, one in October 2018 following a referral from his telecare provider, and another in August 2019 following a referral from the medical oxygen supplier.

What happened to Geoff?

Geoff died in a fire at his home in September 2019. It is believed that after drinking alcohol heavily, he fell asleep while smoking a cigarette. His oxygen canula was on the arm of the sofa next to him and the fire developed rapidly. The window next to Geoff was open and as much of the smoke was escaping through the window, it is believed that there was a delay before the telecare linked smoke alarm in the hallway actuated. The telecare responder alerted WMFS within 1 minute of the smoke alarm actuation, and WMFS were on scene within 6 minutes from the 999 call. Geoff was found on his sofa badly burned and clearly deceased.

What could have been different?

- A fire retardant throw or blanket would have slowed the speed with which the fire developed. (The crew who completed the most recent Safe and Well visit stated that this was offered to Geoff but he declined).
- A suppression (sprinkler) system could have extinguished the fire or significantly slowed the spread of fire.
- Had the questions about smoking and alcohol use been answered correctly, Geoff could have been offered further support to give up smoking and to better manage his alcohol use.
- A co-ordinated and persistent approach by all agencies may have persuaded Geoff to accept risk reduction interventions and equipment, particularly if he had been made aware that refusal may result in him not being prescribed medical oxygen (as per NICE guidelines).
- Had professionals been aware that Geoff was continuing to smoke in the vicinity of his oxygen equipment they could have liaised with the prescriber and ultimately taken steps to remove the equipment.
- An additional smoke detector in the lounge would have alerted the telecare operators more quickly, resulting in earlier attendance of WMFS (although in view of the speed with which the fire developed this may not have altered the outcome).

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE SERVICE

Making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier

www.wmfs.net

@WestMidsFire

Key Recommendations:

- Further research and revision/reissue of guidance around fitting and placement of smoke detectors for users of medical oxygen who continue to smoke.
- Development of robust (ideally automated) information sharing systems to ensure that all professionals are aware of relevant information and that risks are escalated appropriately (ongoing).
- Paragraph 1.2.61 of NICE guidelines NG115 (*“Do not offer long-term oxygen therapy to people who continue to smoke despite being offered smoking cessation advice and treatment, and referral to specialist stop smoking services”* Dec 18) is considered when prescribing medical oxygen to anyone who smokes, particularly if they are unwilling to accept appropriate risk reduction measures.
- Support for smoking cessation, alcohol use and mental ill health is offered at every reasonable opportunity.
- Further consideration by the Safeguarding Adults Review Panel about whether there is additional learning around Geoff’s care and support.

WEST MIDLANDS FIRE SERVICE

Making the West Midlands Safer, Stronger and Healthier

www.wmfs.net

@WestMidsFire