A typical day and the duties of a ward based Health Care Support Worker (HCSW)
Firstly, thank you for taking on this really important role.

In order to help you settle into the role we have listed below some important points and key duties that you will most likely be involved in as a ward based HCSW.

We hope you find this both informative and useful.
Arriving for your shift

Arriving at the hospital before your shift begins is important. You must leave enough time to change out of your everyday clothes, put on your uniform and leave both your belongings and food in a safe place before the shift starts. There may be limited space to keep your belongings so try and keep what you bring to a minimum and don’t bring valuables.

You should look professional, checking that your uniform is as it should be, you have no jewellery on (apart from a plain wedding band), you have your ID badge visible and your hair is neat, tidy and not touching your uniform. Wash your hands using the six-step technique – hand hygiene is such an important part of every healthcare worker’s day.
Getting a Handover

The nurse in charge of your shift will allocate you into a team for the shift. Staff on the previous shift will give an update including new patients, changes to patients’ condition and specific things that need to be done on the shift. You are likely to be given a typed handover sheet, detailing key aspects of each patient’s care to help you look after the patients safely on your shift. Most wards also have a ‘safety brief’ which highlights the patients on the ward who may be more at risk of pressure damage, falls or require assistance with eating and drinking at mealtimes.
First duties of the shift

It’s important to have a caring and positive approach with your patients. As you attend to them, introduce yourself. An easy way to start is “Hello my name is [your name] and along with your nurse I will be looking after you today”. You may be the first person that patient sees in the morning so make sure you start the day with a smile 😊. In the morning, one of the first tasks is getting patients ready for breakfast, helping them to get washed and dressed or assisting them to the toilet.

At this point the care rounding chart for each patient should be checked so that you know how often care is required for that patient throughout your shift. This chart is updated at regular intervals throughout the shift and it’s important to let the nurse know if you are worried about anything. For more information on the care rounding process please click here.
First duties of the shift

When starting a nightshift, the tasks can be quite different and may involve giving out drinks and snacks and getting patients settled in bed for the night. Again take this time to introduce yourself and check and update the care rounding charts.

Involving patients in decisions about their care, asking them what matters to them and updating their ‘What Matters to Me’ board are ways we can ensure that we are delivering care that is right for the patient. A patient may say ‘If possible, could I have help to have a shower’ and it’s our job as a team to try and make sure this happens.
Assisting a patient to wash

Respecting the patient’s privacy and dignity at all times is a key part of your role. It is especially important when carrying out personal hygiene or assisting patients with a wash. When getting ready to assist a patient with a wash, shower, or bath put on appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE). Always find out what they need help with and encourage them to be as independent as possible.

Check if they have a hearing aid or glasses and ensure that these are available to use. Patients can feel better wearing their own clothes and encourage them to change from nightwear to day wear if they have these clothes available. Don’t forget to assist with mouth care, this can be offering their toothbrush, cleaning their dentures or providing moist oral sponges to clean their mouth.
Use this time wisely and fill it with conversation. The patient should have your undivided attention. Ask them ‘What matters today’ and use the cues you are given to lead to conversation. There is a well-known saying ‘people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but they won’t forget how you made them feel’.

At this point the patient’s bed linen is usually changed. Place it straight into the laundry receptacle as near to the bed as possible. Before you leave, check the bed space is clean and tidy, that the patient has their call bell and anything else they need to hand. Remember to update the care rounding chart at the end of this process.
Assisting with other personal care

Patients may or may not be able to tell you when they need to go to the toilet, and it can be quite embarrassing for them if they don’t get to the toilet in time. Find out what’s normal for that patient; are they assisted to the bathroom, do they need to use a commode at the bedside or do they wear pads due to incontinence. When assisting someone always have on appropriate PPE to ensure you are protecting both yourself and the patient from infection.

If your patient is incontinent it is important that their skin is attended to as soon as possible to remove the urine or stool from their skin as it can cause skin damage. The skin must be cleansed using warm water and a skin cleanser, dried and a skin barrier cream applied before new incontinence products are placed on the patient.

Patients may have a fluid balance chart or a Bristol stool chart in use, remember to complete these with the volume of urine or the amount and type of stool passed as these are important in their care.
Assisting with eating and drinking

Food, fluid and nutrition is essential to help patients recover from illness whilst they are in hospital. You will be involved throughout your shift in supporting patients to eat and drink, whether it's just making sure they have access to it when they need it or sitting down to assist them with it. At handover, the nurse in charge will highlight those who need assistance with eating and drinking.

The usual day shift routine includes breakfast, hot drink and snack mid-morning, lunch, hot drink and snack mid-afternoon and evening meal. The night shift staff will offer a hot drink and snack before bed-time and patients can ask for a hot drink during the night if they are awake. The more opportunities a patient gets to eat and drink ‘what is normal for them’ the more likely they are to have enough energy to get better.
Assisting with eating and drinking

Having access to food and drink can be the highlight of the day for many patients and you can be key to making sure the patients have a good mealtime experience. At the start of a shift a mealtime coordinator is identified, their role is to coordinate the mealtime and ensure the patients have all that they need; choice of drink; condiments; assistance and the mealtime runs smoothly.

Catering staff are responsible for the food being at the correct temperature for service and will plate the food for you to take to the patient. As part of their care, some patients may have their food and drink intake recorded on a Food and Drink recording chart or fluid intake only on a Fluid Balance Chart. It is important for you to know which patients are on these charts and for you to document accurately the amount of food and drink they have eaten or drunk before removing their plates and cups.
Using specialist equipment

Keeping patients as mobile as possible and rehabilitating them to being as independent as possible is a team effort. To ensure patient and staff safety, a range of specialist equipment may be used such as hoists, mobility equipment, sliding sheets or stand aids. It is important that you know how to use each of these pieces of equipment before using them with a patient. Physiotherapists offer specialist input to aid mobility and are important members of the team. The equipment necessary for each patient will be part of the information available to you: at the staff handover; it will be written above their bed; and in the patient’s care plan.
Clean and tidy environment

Keeping the environment clean and tidy is the responsibility of the whole team. All wards have access to a domestic assistant who will have a series of tasks they must complete every day, for example damp dusting and washing the floor. The patient’s locker, bedside table and bed are kept clean by the ward staff and it’s important to keep it as clutter-free as possible.

Clean linen is delivered to the ward frequently and you may be asked to put this away in the linen cupboard or asked to restock the linen trolley. Once finished with used linen it should be placed directly into a laundry receptacle close to the point of use. Contaminated linen should be placed directly into a water-soluble/alginate bag and secured with the tie and then placed into a clear plastic bag before putting it into the laundry receptacle. The laundry receptacles should not be overfilled and you may be asked to tie up the laundry and take it outside the ward to the dirty linen deposit bin or chute.
Clean and tidy environment

The way we get rid of waste in the hospital is important, most clinical areas will have two different types of waste bins, one with a black lid (containing a black bag) for domestic waste and one with an orange lid containing an orange bag for clinical waste. These are emptied when 2/3rd full, tied and secured with a cable tie using a ‘swan neck’ closure and the tracer label with the ward on it is added to the bag.

Stores are also delivered by the porters to each ward area. Putting stock away is the role of the ward HCSW and helping with this is a good way for you to find out where everything is kept.
The nurse may ask you to escort a patient to another department, e.g. for an X ray. Your role is to keep the patient safe and reassure them by keeping them informed about what is happening. You may be asked to look after patient records until you get back to the ward. Patients will normally be moved in a wheelchair or in their bed. Porters also help to move patients from one area to another.
Special Observations

Some patients can be at increased risk of coming to harm whilst in hospital due to a new confusion, or changes in their behaviour. These patients may need an enhanced level of observation to prevent them from coming to harm. For these patients it is important to know information about them as a person. The ‘Getting to Know Me’ document which can be filled out by a family member and kept at the bedside. The ‘What Matters to Me’ board can give you information which can help you to interact with the patient and reduce their levels of stress and distress.

For these patients you may be asked to complete a patient behaviour chart which will indicate the types of behaviour the patient is displaying and allows you and the team to look for patterns in their behaviour. For example ‘I’ve noticed that my patient’s behaviour changes just before they need to move their bowels’. If you can help them to the toilet when you see this behaviour starting, the patient’s stress may be reduced.
Ending the shift

Caring for patients on a ward can be really rewarding but it can also be tiring being on your feet and on the go for most of the 12 hour shift. Before going off shift check that you have completed all the bedside documentation for your patients such as Care Rounding; Food and Drink; Fluid Balance Chart and other charts which are important in the care we provide for patients.

Where possible, it’s important that the staff on the next shift come on to a clean and tidy ward in order for them to continue to provide safe care. Therefore making sure all dirty linen is tied up, new linen is available, bins are emptied and removed from the ward and the ward kitchen is clean and tidy are very important duties to be undertaken by the ward team.
Ending the shift

You must make sure that any handover sheets (with patient details on them) are placed in the confidential waste before leaving the ward and that you know when you are next rostered on shift.

Once the next shift have had their handover you can get ready to go home. Wash your hands before leaving the ward area and change out of your uniform and take it home in a plastic bag to reduce any risk of infection. When at home, launder your uniforms separately from other household linen and at a maximum temperature that the fabric can tolerate, before tumble-drying or ironing.
Going home

It is important for your own mental health and wellbeing to follow these steps before heading for home and rest, recharge and look after yourself so that you are in good health to return to next shift.

- Take a moment to think about today
- Acknowledge the most difficult thing at work today, and then let it go
- Be proud of what you did at work today
- Consider three things that went well
- Check on your colleagues before you leave: are they ok?
- Are you ok? Your colleagues are here to listen to and support you too
- Now switch your attention to home.
- Rest and recharge