



Defence Medical Welfare Service



A guide for Healthcare Professionals, Organisations,
and Support Workers supporting the Armed Forces
Community in Scotland



Defence Medical Welfare Service (DMWS) is an independent charity dedicated to providing medical welfare to the **Armed Forces Community**. We embed trained professional Wellbeing/Welfare Officers in NHS Trusts and Boards across the UK to deliver additional support for those who are on the clinical pathway. Whether it is a new or pre-existing issue, our service is available for anyone undergoing or seeking treatment for a health-related condition. Our Welfare Service can be found in hospitals, veteran hubs, and community outreach programmes throughout the UK and Cyprus.

Who are the Armed Forces Community?

The Armed Forces Community (AFC) includes serving personnel, reservists, veterans, and their families, including parents, children, and partners, dependents, and the bereaved. This can be from the Army, the Navy, the Royal Marines or Royal Air Forces.

Veterans are defined as anyone who has served for at least one day in His Majesty's Armed Forces.

Why is specialist support needed?

The Armed Forces Community (AFC) can face unique challenges that can affect their health, wellbeing, and ability to access services. Specialist support is essential because:

Military service can have lasting impacts – including physical injuries, mental health conditions like PTSD, and the effects of repeated deployments or operational stress.

Transitions can be difficult – moving from military to civilian life often involves adjusting to a different healthcare system, culture, and support network.

Needs may be hidden – members of this community are often reluctant to ask for help or may not disclose their background, meaning issues can go unidentified.

Families are affected too – partners and children can face disruption, emotional strain, and a lack of consistent support, especially during postings or deployments.

Understanding is key – health and care professionals with military-informed insight can better build trust, spot underlying issues, and provide appropriate, targeted support.

Access to entitlements and services – the community may be unaware of the help available or struggle to navigate complex systems for military-specific services.

How do we help?

Armed Forces patients arrive in clinical or medical settings with a range of needs which can go unsupported if not identified and addressed. Our support is military-informed allowing us to build trust with patients and gain insights, untangle various issues and concerns which may otherwise go unnoticed.

Our staff will work alongside healthcare providers to assess, identify, and address the physical, mental, social care, wellbeing and welfare needs of the patient and their family. Our physical presence is widely well-received by the NHS Boards we are embedded in as we offer information and support to staff to help them provide care to the Armed Forces Community. For the patient, we address physical and mental health and wellbeing non-clinical issues and tackle the wider determinants of health such as:

- Mental Health
- Social Isolation and Loneliness
- Housing or Homelessness Issues
- Self-harm or thoughts of taking ones own life
- Independent Living
- Substance misuse
- Frailty and Falls
- Lack of Support
- Carer Roles
- Unemployment and Financial Issues
- Relationship Struggles
- Bereavement

Our support includes:

- Making independent and impartial early assessment of the patients' needs
- Visiting patients in hospital and providing clinic and outpatient appointment support
- Liaising between the workplace, the NHS, service providers and the patient
- Providing a 'Listening Ear' service, encouraging engagement
- Intelligent signposting and supported referrals for patients to other statutory, voluntary, community, organisations and services
- Recognising and supporting issues that may be affecting a patient's wellbeing, delaying their recovery and discharge
- Identifying and actioning any safeguarding concerns
- Accompany families to critical care and specialist units
- Supporting the bereaved and terminally ill
- Resolving conflict and managing patient and family expectations
- Consulting with and supporting family members



What are the benefits of using DMWS?

Our expertise lies in our early intervention and assessment of patient needs outside the clinical treatment pathway, allowing health care providers to focus on their core work.

Our services are designed to be delivered in partnership with the NHS, with Welfare Officers embedded directly within hospital settings. We work hand in-hand with healthcare professionals to better coordinate our support services and provide context and insight into the unique challenges faced by the Armed Forces Community with our understanding of military culture and how issues may present.

In our projects in Scotland, we are also working closely with Health and Social Care Partnerships to help shift the balance of care from acute hospital services to more care closer to home, which is where patients would rather be.

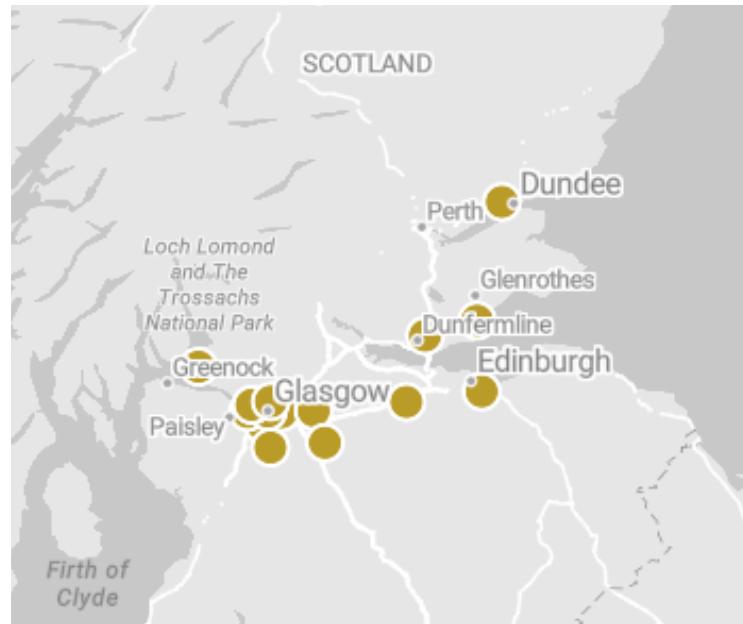
The knowledge, expertise, and local networks of the DMWS welfare team enable appropriate referrals to localised services in both the statutory and third sectors. DMWS can access a broad range of third sector services and support to address the concerns of the service user and their families, reducing the burden on health and local authority services.

The difference we make

- Saving money by reducing hospital length-of stay through fostering positive engagement and sourcing external support
- Helping to tackle Delayed Transfer of Care issues by providing additional options for transitional care and thereby reducing 'bed-blocking'
- Reducing 'Did Not Attends' rates by accompanying patients to appointments
- Freeing up clinical staff to concentrate on their core duties instead of managing non-medical issues
- Assist with the patient discharge plans and mobilising additional armed forces community and families' specific resources in the community often reducing the 'Length of Stay'
- Working closely with other third sector and statutory organisations to improve support at home provision which in turn can reduce the risk of re-admission and help the patient build self-reliance
- Helping to reduce the risk of complaints or litigation by acting as a professional intermediary and resolving issues as they arise
- Delivering a positive patient experience leading to improved feedback for health care partners
- Through engagement and advocacy our Welfare Officers can help towards securing accreditations such as the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme and help NHS health boards demonstrate due regard to the Armed Forces Covenant.

"I think talking to DMWS could save lives."

In Scotland, we are currently operating within **five NHS health boards**, providing critical care at the bedside for patients who are members of the Armed Forces Community. We also work closely with Health and Social Care Partnerships to provide support in the community to keep people living well at home.



We are proud to work in partnership with:

- NHS Fife
- NHS Lanarkshire
- NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde
- NHS Lothian
- NHS Tayside
- Scottish Ambulance Service

How can you help?

Early identification is important to ensure any disadvantage is removed and if appropriate special consideration is given.

- Ask patients 'Have you or a close family member served in the UK Armed Forces?'

If they answer yes, are they serving (regular or reservist), have served (a veteran) or a dependant family member?

Record the response in their patient record.

Staff in Scotland are also encouraged to complete **NHS Scotland's Armed Forces and Veterans Recognition Scheme eLearning** which is available to all staff on the NHS Education for Scotland Turas learning platform. You will find information relevant to both primary and secondary care settings.

How to make a referral

Armed Forces Community ask if they would like to have a visit from a DMWS Welfare Officer and seek their consent to contact us. We can also support clinical teams to find solutions to any non-clinical barriers preventing recovery or timely discharge.

Contact us:

Email referrals@dmsw.org.uk

Telephone: 0800 999 3697

When you get in touch it would be helpful if you have the following information:

- Name and contact details of the patient
- Location – hospital/ward number if applicable
- Confirm if consent has been obtained
- The Service background (Army/Navy/Royal Navy etc)
- NOK details

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