

Chapter 8:

Support for carers

Chapter summary:

In this chapter we review:

- n How to get support services if you are a carer
- n Your rights as a 'nearest relative'
- n Organisations who can provide help and advice

Who are carers?

Informal carers are people who provide help or support to a relative, partner or friend who experiences mental distress, and are not paid. They may give practical help or emotional support or, more likely, a combination of both. They may live with the person who has mental health problems or provide care from a distance.

Supporting carers to care

Under carers' legislation, carers have a legal right to an assessment of their needs. It is a chance to discuss with a social worker, nurse or other assessor what help they need. Since the Carers (Equal Opportunities) Act, 2004 became law, carers are entitled to receive support with caring so that they can continue to pursue other activities which are important to them.

To qualify for a carer's assessment, a carer has to provide a substantial amount of care on a regular basis or intensive support in times of crisis. They may be eligible for a carer's assessment even if the person they care for refuses an assessment. They can have their assessment separately and in private.

To request a carer's assessment, a carer should contact the care co-ordinator of the person they look after. If the person does not have an allocated worker, a carer can ask their family doctor to put them in touch with social services. Alternatively, Haringey Carers' Support Team on 020 8489 3967 can make a referral to the appropriate team. If the cared for person is in hospital, a carer can approach their primary nurse.

Following an assessment, and where needed, a carer can have services provided directly to them.

Planning care

Carers should be listened to and included in care planning. If possible - and beforehand - carers should agree with the person they care for what points they want to raise. The views of carers may sometimes conflict with the wishes of the person with mental distress, but they should expect to be able to put them forward. Support from an advocate may be helpful.

Sharing of personal information

As long as the person cared for agrees, carers should receive a copy of the care plan. The amount of information the carer receives will depend on the wishes of the cared for person. If they are happy for the carer to be kept informed, this should be made clear to the professionals involved, for example, in writing. If not, the carer will receive information only in general terms. Equally, what the carer discusses with mental health professionals should be treated as confidential and not disclosed without their agreement.

'Advanced directives', drawn up by the cared for person at a time when they are well may help overcome some of these difficulties.

'Nearest relative'

The Mental Health Act sets out the list of people who may be a person's 'nearest relative' and the rules that decide who it is at any given time, depending on the person's current personal circumstances. The 'nearest relative' is strictly defined using rules set out in the Mental Health Act and is not always the same as the 'next of kin'. For advice about who is the 'nearest relative', contact the local Community Mental Health Team.

If a Mental Health Act assessment is being carried out, the approved social worker (ASW) must try to identify and contact the 'nearest relative'.

Under the Mental Health Act the 'nearest relative' has various legal rights. The main ones are these. The 'nearest relative':

- n can ask for an ASW to assess whether the person should be compulsorily admitted to hospital, and to inform them in writing if no application for hospital admission is then made
- n can apply themselves for the person to be compulsorily admitted to hospital (although this happens very rarely and it is usually the ASW who makes the application)
- n must, if practicable, be consulted if the ASW is considering applying for the patient's admission for assessment under Section 2 or Section 4
- n must, if practicable, be consulted if the ASW is considering applying for the patient's admission for treatment under Section 3; in this case the application cannot go ahead if the 'nearest relative' objects
- n must be informed of the decision to compulsorily admit the person to hospital
- n can ask for the person to be discharged from hospital (although in some cases the responsible medical officer can prevent this)
- n has the right to information from the ASW about the role of 'nearest relative', unless the patient objects to this information being given, has the right to information from the hospital managers about the effect of detention under the Mental Health Act, the patient's rights of appeal and the eventual discharge of the patient.

In exercising the rights of 'nearest relative', it is assumed that the carer is mentally competent and is acting in a reasonable way, taking account of the welfare of the person and the interests of the public. If this is in dispute, or if the patient has no 'nearest relative' as defined in the Act, it is possible for the rights to be assigned to someone else by the county court.

If a carer does not wish to act as 'nearest relative', they may agree with another suitable person for them to take on the role. The Community Mental Health Team and the Mental Health Act Office must be notified in writing of this decision by the 'nearest relative'.

Complaints

If a carer is dissatisfied with the treatment the person they care for is receiving, or feels their voice is not being heard, they can make a formal complaint. Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust and Haringey Council both have written complaints procedures - see Chapter 6. The various voluntary sector organisations involved in providing services to people with mental health problems will also have such procedures and should be contacted directly. A carer can approach a local organisation for advocacy support.

A guide for carers is available from:

National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE)

Tel: 020 7307 2431

Website: www.nimhe.org

or www.londondevelopmentcentre.org

Who to contact for help

Local carers groups or Haringey Carers Centre can provide valuable support. Contact with other carers can diminish feelings of loneliness and of having no one to turn to who truly understands. Organisations that support carers of people with mental ill health include:

Admiral Nurses

Eastgate Lodge

St Ann's Hospital

St Ann's Road

Tottenham N15 3TH

Tel: 020 8442 6233

Service: *Support for carers of people with dementia.*

Alzheimer's Society Haringey

R18

William Rainbird House

Beaufoy Road

Tottenham N17 8AY

Tel: 020 8808 9931

Email: alzhariney@btconnect.com

Service: *Support group for carers of people with Alzheimer's / dementia.*

Black and Minority Ethnic Carers Support Service

Selby Centre

Selby Road

Tottenham N17 8JL

Tel: 020 8808 5510 / 020 8801 5530

Fax: 020 8880 3470

Email: info@bmecarers.org.uk

Website: www.bmecarers.org.uk

Service: *BME Carers Support Service provides respite service, bereavement service, Carers Support Group (monthly meeting) and Haringey Carers Consultative Forum (quarterly meetings) to all carers living in Haringey. The North London Carers Learning Network provides short courses to all carers living in North London.*

Carers' Development

Haringey Social Service

40 Cumberland Road

Wood Green N22 7SG

Tel: 020 8489 3967

Service: *Highlighting services, carers' assessments, training opportunities and short breaks for carers. Commissioning of new services for carers, working with care management teams and the carers' network.*

Haringey Carers' Centre

Winkfield Resource Centre
33 Winkfield Road
Wood Green N22 5RP
Tel: 020 8489 8980

Service: *Information, advice and support for unpaid carers. Benefits advice and group representation.*

NCH/Haringey Young Carers Project

Red Gables Family Centre
113 Crouch Hill
Crouch End N8 9QN
Tel. 020 8348 4660
Fax: 020 8348 4660

Email: Haringeyyoungcarers@nch.org.uk

Service: *Support, information and advice for young carers from 5 to 18 years and their families.*

Mental Health Carers Support Association

334 High Road
Tottenham N15 4BN
Tel: 020 8885 2006

Email: mhcarerssupport@aol.com

Service: *Advice, information, casework/advocacy, support group, respite, and training in mental health.*