

- The carer will often have a vital role in feeding back information on behaviour patterns through observation. Carers will often be able to 'read the signs' to alert the care team of an impending relapse. This unique view of behaviour should be recognised and respected.
- Carers welcome the opportunity of being involved in discussing possible non-drug treatments and will often have a key role in the application of such treatments (e.g. family interventions and other psychological and socio-psychological therapies).
- Psychiatrists should always be aware that carers can be of great assistance in monitoring the holistic health and behavioural patterns of the patient.

5 . Signposts and referrals

- The psychiatrist will often be the first person to explain to the family the nature of the mental health problem. As a result, the family will generally regard the psychiatrist as the leader of the care team and the 'fount of all knowledge'.
- So the family will look to the psychiatrist for signposts such as:
 1. Where to go to get information on mental illness, the services available to the family member who is unwell and the services available to the family as carers.
 2. Referring the family to the most appropriate member of the care team to fully explain what a carer's assessment is and how it can be accessed.
 3. Referring the carer to their GP so that physical and mental health checks can be carried out.
 4. Giving details to carers of psychological and family intervention services that might be available in the locality.
 5. Providing information on help lines, support groups and education programmes.

N.B. Partners in Care campaign material can be downloaded at <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/campaigns/partnersincare.aspx>

West Midlands Division



A MESSAGE TO PSYCHIATRISTS FROM CARERS

INTRODUCTION

This is a leaflet prepared by a group of carers from Coventry and Warwickshire at the suggestion of Dr Afzal Javed, Chair of the Executive Committee of the West Midlands Division of the Royal College of Psychiatrists.

It has come about as a direct result of the successful Partners in Care campaign and supplements leaflets prepared in that campaign such as '**A checklist for carers**', which suggests a menu of questions to help carers prepare for a meeting with the psychiatrist of the person they care for and '**Carers and confidentiality**', provided primarily for psychiatrists.

Psychiatrists may also wish to refer to '**A checklist for psychiatrists**' which predicts the issues of concern to carers when meeting psychiatrists. All three pamphlets were published jointly by the Royal College of Psychiatrists and the Princess Royal Trust for Carers in 2004.

The writers of this leaflet have attempted to highlight briefly and positively some key issues for psychiatrists to consider when communicating with and considering the needs of carers.

1 . Understanding carers and their needs

- Carers are ordinary people of all ages, cultures, faiths and communities who give their support through love and duty.
- A psychotic experience within the family will often cause carers worry, stress and fear from which there is no escape.
- This may be accompanied by feelings of guilt, confusion, helplessness and isolation which can impact on their own physical and mental well being.
- They seek to be acknowledged, listened to and respected for the care they want to provide.

- They will need guidance about the diagnosis and treatment for their loved one and how this may affect their daily lives.
- They will need information about local services, help-lines and support networks as early as possible.
- They thirst for discussions with the psychiatrist about events, trends and concerns about behaviours in order to participate in the care and recovery programme and to help to avoid relapse.
- Carers become frustrated and angry at the often rigid and impractical approach taken on confidentiality.
- They have a legal entitlement to be offered a carers assessment.

2 . Communicating with carers

- Carers seek to be recognised as the person who knows the patient best and they appreciate a communication style that recognises and respects this.
- They will appreciate receiving all relevant information and knowledge being delivered openly and with the avoidance of jargon.
- It is vital that the carer has the opportunity of asking questions of the psychiatrist and that these questions are answered with patience and empathy.
- Emphasising lack of blame and being empowered to work with the psychiatrist and the care team is very helpful to a carer.
- Carers want to feel part of the solution not part of the problem.
- They need to know what to do in times of emergency and crisis.
- Information about the diagnosis, treatment and medications (as far as is possible) and also the potential risks and side effects is all helpful to carers.
- It is helpful for carers to feel that their burden is understood by the care team.

3 . Carers and Confidentiality

- The Partners in Care leaflet '**Carers and confidentiality in mental health**' is a helpful guide to good practice in dealing with carers.
- If fully and properly explained, carers are more likely to understand the ethical and legal obligations of client confidentiality and will recognise that they may not need to know what takes place between the patient and clinician.
- However they have a right to know what they need to know to be effective carers and how they can best contribute to care and recovery.
- Encouragement should be given to the patient to concur with the involvement of the carer and to agree an appropriate Advanced Directive if possible. Consideration should be given as to which member of the care team is the most appropriate person to speak to the patient about this.
- A pragmatic approach should be taken to seeking a solution to a confidentiality problem—the door should not just be shut in the face of the carer.
- Carers need their own confidentiality requirements to be acknowledged and respected—carer's notes should be kept separate to the patient's file. On occasions, they also appreciate the opportunity to speak to the psychiatrist in private.

4 . Carers and medication

- Carers appreciate being consulted about the medication prescribed and being given information about the side effects both long and short term. This is particularly important when there is a change in the prescribed medications.
- Very often the carer will have a role in assisting with medication compliance and this role should be discussed and agreed with the carer. In such cases the carer needs full details of the medications, dosages and frequency of application. A copy of the care plan should be given to the carer wherever possible even if it is an amended version.