

Sharing Information between doctors, patients and carers:  
A brief guide for patients and their carers in older people's mental health services.

Introduction

It is very important that you and your carers have the clinical information that you need when you have seen the psychiatrist.

During the consultation the psychiatrist will explain what they think is wrong with you. It is often difficult to be certain of the diagnosis so they may suggest that you have further investigations. These may be blood tests or other tests such as an ECG (to look at your heart) or a brain scan. They may also ask another colleague, such as a psychologist, to see you if they think it is necessary.

They may also recommend some treatment such as tablets or psychological treatment. They will also tell you whether they need to see you again or whether you will see a psychiatric nurse or another member of the team or that you do not need any follow up.

All this is a lot of information and you may find it helpful to have some of it written down.

Copying clinical letters to patients

Since 2004 there has been a policy, introduced by the Department of Health, to try and make sharing information more open. One way of doing this is for you and your carer if you wish, to have a copy of the letter that the psychiatrist sends to your GP. You may prefer to have a letter written directly to you by the psychiatrist. The psychiatrist will discuss this with you and you can then decide if you would find this helpful. Some people like to have written information but others prefer not to have the information written down at all, or prefer just to have some key points on paper. This is up to you. Occasionally the doctor may feel a letter would not help you and will then give the information verbally. If you do not have the capacity to understand it because of your illness the doctor will not necessarily send the letter to your carer unless it has been carefully discussed.

Advice on copying clinical Letters to patients

If you want to know a bit more about the policy there are guidelines available which have been drawn up between Age Concern, the Alzheimers Society and the Royal College of Psychiatrists. The guidelines were written after discussion with both patients and their carers and recognise that people may feel differently from one another on this subject. The guidelines are called *Copying Clinical Letters to Patients; Guidelines for Old Age Psychiatrists*.

They are available from:

The Royal College of Psychiatrists  
17 Belgrave Square  
London SW1X 8PG  
Tel: 0207 235 2351 or on the College web site

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