



A Briefing Note for GPs and Primary Care Practitioners

The Carers Strategies (Wales) Measure 2010

A new law – a summary

General Practitioners, and other primary care staff, will be affected by new legal duties on the NHS in Wales.

The Carers Strategies (Wales) Measure 2010 requires each Local Health Board, Velindre NHS Trust and the Wales Ambulance Trust to prepare, publish and implement a Strategy for ensuring that unpaid family carers get essential information and are consulted about the care of the people they look after. The draft Strategies, drawn up with partner local authorities, have been submitted to Welsh Government and are awaiting approval for implementation.

The new legislation covers carers of all ages, including young carers.

Who are carers?

Unpaid carers support people who are ill, frail or disabled. They are of all ages and from all backgrounds. Carers are the key partners in sustaining long term care within local communities. Without them, the health and social care system would collapse.

Key statistics

- There are 350,000+ carers in Wales, 90,000 of whom care for more than 50 hours a week³.
- Carers provide **96%** of all community care in Wales⁴.
- The NHS Social Services rely on the willingness and ability of family carers to provide support to people with long term health and social care needs. The cost of replacing this care in Wales is estimated at **£7.72 billion each year**⁵

³ Census 2001

⁴ *Care at Home, Challenges, Possibilities and Implications for the Workforce – Report for Care Council for Wales June 2010*

⁵ *Valuing Carers 2011 – Carers UK*

The key objectives in the Carers Information Strategies are to ensure:

- Early identification of carers – develop and implement the Practice Action Plan (see page 3).
- Provision of relevant, up to date, targeted information to carers at every point of their caring journey.
- Information on the right to an independent assessment of a carer's needs.
- That, where patient consent is withheld, carers are provided with as much information as possible without breaching patient confidentiality.
- That NHS staff, at a minimum, are able to identify and signpost carers they come across to appropriate, targeted information. Your LHB and Local Authority 'Carers Strategy' will clearly outline the support available both locally and nationally (January 2013).
- That LHBs provide support locally on the practicalities of delivering this improved service e.g. how to best use IT to register and support carers'.

Case Scenario 1

Amanda looks after her husband who has Bipolar Disorder and her son, J, who has been diagnosed with psychosis. Amanda has had treatment for stress and anxiety. This may have been unnecessary with earlier access to the information and support she needed.

"At the time J was admitted to hospital, and he was there for a period of 2 to 3 months, I was never directed to any support for myself as a carer or really sat down and had it explained what might be involved in being a carer. I was working at the time in a job I enjoyed very much but unfortunately I had to give that up to be a full time carer for my husband and son.

The implications of not having the support earlier were tremendous. I felt very low, confused and upset and I felt I was just left to get on with things. I feel that if I had all the information given to me when he was first admitted things would have been a lot different for the whole family."

New Requirements affecting General Practitioners

The guidance on the new Measure, issued by the Welsh Government in December 2011¹, makes a clear recommendation that carer champions are identified within GP surgeries, as well as hospital wards and clinics, to act as a source of information for carers.

Each Local Health Board may, subject to local discussions, identify specific roles within their Information Strategy that they wish primary care practitioners to undertake. For example, your Local Health Board may expect your practice to achieve the minimum standards for carer support outlined in one of the toolkits² which they are promoting for General Practitioners.

More details will be available from your own LHB.

A key intention of the new legislation is to improve the health and well being of carers.

People who provide high levels of care and support for sick or disabled relatives and friends are more than twice as likely to suffer from poor health compared to those without caring responsibilities⁶. However, many carers have to struggle on their own for a long time before they get essential information and help.

Research by Carers UK found that:

- 65% of people with a caring responsibility did not realise they were carers in the first year of caring.
- 32% of the people in the study took over five years to realise they were carers .
- for 4%, it took over 16 years⁷.

Not getting the right information at the right time has negative consequences for the health of carers and for the people they look after. In turn, this has significant consequences for health budgets.

¹ <http://wales.gov.uk/topics/health/publications/socialcare/guidance1/carers/?lang=en>

² Examples include: *Supporting Carers: An action guide for general practitioners and their teams* RCGP and The Princess Royal Trust for Carers (now part of the Carers Trust) and *Investors in Carers Award Scheme* -details available from Hywel Dda Local Health Board.

⁶ *In poor health – the impact of caring on health* – Carers UK 2001

⁷ *ibid*

Case Scenario 2

Steven looks after his mother who has dementia and other ailments, and also his father who is elderly and frail.

“The hospital ...was very hit and miss, not a uniform coherent structure to tap into. My health has been affected by the fact that in the early days I had to struggle to do so much because I didn't know what help was there. I went through a period of quite severe depression as I felt I was having to do everything on my own and it feels like you're fighting to get the proper services and none of it seems to make sense. It's no wonder they say caring is a stressful occupation; if you can call it that.

If you've got someone in place like a coordinating agent whose only role is to point you in the right direction and help you get access to the various services, that would be terrific... a single expert ...to say you need to do this or that. Brilliant!”

General Practitioners - the essential ingredient for the successful implementation of the Carers Strategies (Wales) Measure 2010

General Practitioners will continue to have an essential role in improving things for carers.

Why Is This?

- 4 out of 5 carers⁸ report that their first point of contact with any statutory agency is with a health centre or GP practice.
- General Practitioners, and staff within their practices, are ideally placed to identify carers and signpost them to the appropriate sources of information, advice and support.

Knowing where to find practical and financial help is crucial in enabling carers to deal with very difficult situations. It reduces their stress, anxiety and long term health problems and indirectly, helps to improve the health and wellbeing of the people they look after.

The Carer Strategy in your area will provide General Practices with clear direction as to how to identify and improve the support currently available to carers. These strategies are due in January 2013.

⁸ *Carers Strategies (Wales) Measure 2010* – Guidance issued to Local Health Boards and Local Authorities December 2012

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Next Steps - Develop a Practice Action Plan

1. Ensure all staff in the Practice are aware of how complex the lives of carers can be and make a commitment to supporting them in as many ways as possible.
2. Identify a carers' lead within the practice – the Practice Manager often takes this on.
3. Identify and record the people on your lists who may be carers (NB: include children and young people who may be supporting a parent or sibling).
 - a. Ask patients if they are looking after someone who relies on them for help.

or

if they have a family member who looks after them.
 - b. Keep the practice register up to date.
4. Involve carers in patient care – remember, where it is appropriate, to include young carers.
5. Proactively work to improve healthcare for carers:
 - regular health checks
 - flexible appointments
6. Signpost carers to other sources:
 - invite specialist carer support workers from voluntary organisations to provide information and support to carers.
 - ensure carers have emergency plans in place.
 - display information relevant to carers, including young carers.
7. Audit and improve carer support and actively involve carers in reviewing how the practice can better support them.

More information on all of the above can be found by clicking on the link below:

Supporting Carers Action Plan 2nd Edition - RCGP and the Carers Trust

http://www.rcgp.org.uk/professional_development/continuing_professional_devt/carers.aspx

Case Scenario 3

Lynn looks after her husband who had a stroke.

“...the information I was given was really good, I saw a picture of the clot. Dr Liz explained how big it was, the cause and how they could try to alleviate it. That part of the treatment and the information given was excellent. There was a lot of information and we had an information pack. It was after about a fortnight I looked at it and it was from the Stroke Association. I contacted the Family and Carers Support Coordinator and from then on I had all the information I wanted.”

The right information at the right time has meant that Lynn now, is a key part of the care and rehabilitation programme for her husband. She has been particularly involved in his speech therapy, trained and supported in this by a speech therapist. This has substantially reduced the amount of direct input needed from the speech therapist and has also improved the outcomes for both the patient and Lynn.

Conclusion

A new duty and a new opportunity

Informing and consulting with carers is now a statutory duty on the NHS in Wales. Supporting carers in this way provides GPs with an opportunity to improve the health and quality of life of patients in families dealing with serious or long term illness and disability. Helping carers also helps you.

A second 'Carers' Information Sheet is to be produced in 2013 which will include helpful advice and more information about young carers.



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Useful Resources

A Directory of the key national voluntary organisations that support carers can be found at

www.carerswales.org/walescarersalliancedirectory