

Good Practice Guidelines – Carers Champions

Introduction

Carers often do not see themselves as such. They see themselves as the partner, wife, husband, friend, daughter of a patient. Their medical practice plays an important role in helping these people understand that as carers they have rights and entitlement to information and support that might make their lives easier and help the patient they care for.

Local data shows that just over 1 in every 9 patients registered at a medical practice in Nottinghamshire may have caring responsibilities. Caring can be very rewarding but it can in turn affect physical and mental health resulting in isolation and often crisis. Meaningful support at the right stage can enable carers to maintain their own health and wellbeing care better and for longer and avoid carer breakdown. Medical practices are often the first point of contact for a patient and carer and thus are in an ideal position to identify and provide carers with access to support and information.

This guidance is primarily addressed to carer champions, frontline staff and their managers involved in supporting unpaid carers in medical practice settings, though the principles are applicable to commissioners, providers of services and can be used to inform carers and the people they care for.

The aim of the guidance is to inspire all practices to prioritise carers, offer guidance to carer champions and support to maintain their efforts and enthusiasm over time.

Unpaid Carer: A carer is someone who helps another person, usually a friend, relative or neighbour, in their day to day life. This could be because of their illness, disability, mental health or substance misuse. This is not the same as someone who provides care professionally, or through a voluntary organisation.

The Care Act 2014

From 1st April 2015 carers have been given the same recognition, respect and parity of esteem with those they support.

The Act gives local authorities a responsibility to assess a carers needs for support, where the carer appears to have such needs. This assessment will consider the impact of caring on the carer. This will mean more carers are able to have an assessment, comparable to the right of the people they care for.

Although the Act itself places responsibility on local authority the NHS have also make their own commitment to carers. Part of NHS England's Commitment to Carers, is working alongside other organisations, to give carers greater support and improve their quality of life which includes 'Commissioning for Carers'; 10 principles aimed to help CCGs deliver the best outcomes for carers. The principles are a practical tool and part of a suite of products that will help commissioners to deliver what carers say is important to them in ways that have been shown to work effectively and efficiently in practice

Recruitment

Best practice suggests that at least one practice member will take the lead as carer champion

Carers Champions who are clear and enthusiastic about their role will achieve greater success than those coerced into it.

Consider an individual who may be in a prime position to fulfil the role with the least amount of disruption to their day to day role e.g. staff who are visible to carers and are able to link in with all members of their practice team

Some practices have chosen more than one lead. E.g. some have a receptionist who is more 'hands on', plus a GP partner who takes a more strategic lead for carer support.

Ensure that expectations are explicit (See role description below) and that a willing volunteer is sought to fulfil the role.

Ensure that tasks involved are not too onerous and that awareness and support is contributed as a whole team effort.

Although effective carer support often will rely on one enthusiastic individual, a whole team approach is vital for sustainability.

The role

Carers Champions usually have numerous other work responsibilities and the role needs to be as simple as possible;

The carer champion is able to act as the main contact person for carers, other staff members and local carer organisations. They will maintain the practice resources for carers and take a lead in developing new initiatives.

To successfully support carers in a practice all staff need to be aware and involved.

This guidance identifies 8 key elements within the role of carer champion which are recommended as good practice to achieve better partnership working with, and support to, the unpaid carer. This has been developed collaboratively with Carer Champions and medical staff across the 45 practice member groups in Nottinghamshire's Southern NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups. For each element below we can suggest examples of good practice and links to useful resources.

1. Promote and embed awareness to the needs of carers within their practice

Ensure that the whole practice team are carer aware. A carer champion could encourage carer awareness training for practice staff, with the help of a carer organisation.

Does everyone in the practice know who the carer champion is? Where the carer information is kept?

Developing a carer policy could be a useful tool that will outline how the practice intends to identify and support their carers, and offers a clear pathway for carers within their practice.

2. Co facilitate the identification of young and adult carers alongside support from local carer services

Pursue new and innovative, in addition to traditional, methods of identifying carers.

Ensure newly identified carers are being added to the carers register

Examples of methods of identifying carers could include:

- Opportunistically by reception staff, GPs and nurses.
- Encouraging self identification by having notices boards, websites, social media and newsletters, which also provide information about benefits of being registered as a carer
- Adding carer questions to forms such as new patient checks, chronic disease reviews and prescription slips.
- During Flu Vaccine season

3. Promote engagement with carers across their practice team

Once someone is identified as a carer, it is essential that this information is available to all staff involved in the care of the patient by correctly coding carers.

Utilise carers register to become a more meaningful resource for engaging with carers. Keep registered carers up to date with support and information available locally, nationally and across health care

It is important to keep the register up to date, including removing carers when the person they care for dies or becomes well. It can be distressing for carers to receive information after the person they care for has died. **E.g. Using text services to remind carers they are on the register and encourage carers to notify the practice of they wish to be removed.**

Acknowledge and support carers to maintain their own health needs. Encourage carers to stay healthy and prioritise their own health and wellbeing. This could be recognising where a carer struggles to access their own health appointments due to commitments as part of their caring role.

Where possible, provide the opportunities for carers to have a voice within the practice patient participation group (PPG). **E.g. The PPG, in some cases, support their practices by seeking feedback, questions and suggestions from their carer members and patients in order to keep carers involved in the ongoing development of the practices carer strategy.**

Engagement with carers is a vital part of good patient care and gaining consent at the earliest possible opportunity for information sharing ensures that joint working can happen. **Carers often know the person they care for better than anyone else.**

4. Maintain the profile of the subject of carers across the practice (meeting agendas and new initiatives)

Become a voice for carers within the practice setting. Provide carer testimonies and feedback during practices meetings and consider the impact on carers when discussing new initiatives and publications.

E.g. multidisciplinary meetings can highlight vulnerable and housebound patients who have a carer.

5. Engage in networking appropriate to the role, such as forums and champions meetings

Share good working practices along with challenges that are being faced with other member practices as well as within their own medical practice in order to build on best practices and support each other with new initiatives.

6. Inform carers of their rights and entitlements especially those outlines in the Care Act 2014

Ensure that carers are aware of their benefits and are informed about the opportunity of completing a carer assessment provided by local authority.

Where possible signpost to and display options for social support available for carers and patients

7. Draw attention to any national or local developments relevant to supporting carers

This could be using notice boards, websites and more direct ways of contact such as SMS systems or newsletter.

Registering as a practice with Carers UK (www.carersuk.org) will give practices access to timely information, up to date resources and valuable publications for carers

8. Act as a point of contact for external and internal communication on the subject of carers

Draw the attention of carers, practice staff and other professional to the named Carer Champion through literature, online resources and word of mouth.

Distribute information amongst practice staff and alert local carer support services to any lacks in information for carer available at the practice.

Support for Carer Champions

Carer champions must have clear and open support from their managers and receive allocated time to undertake their carer champion responsibilities.

Local carer services are available to provide support and information into the medical practice via the carer champion, in some case they may be available to offer training to a whole practice team or as part of a locality Protected Learning Time

A Carer Champion is not expected to hold all the knowledge around carer issues and in many cases may only require the contact details for signposting to a single carers' information and advice service

A Carer Champion is not expected to offer ongoing structured or emotional support nor be available for carers at any given time; a carer champion is a point of contact both internally for staff and carers and externally for professionals in order to ensure effective communication is happening across health care, social care and the third sector.