

Introduction

The 14 week consultation on the draft NHS Constitution has been published alongside a ten year plan (see Trust Briefing Ten Year NHS Plan). For the first time in a key NHS document, carers have been given prominence as partners in care. We welcome this as the beginning of a culture change in the NHS towards valuing the extraordinary caring contribution of ordinary people. We hope this direction will be taken up by all health professionals and providers.

The Constitution begins with seven key principles to “guide the NHS in all it does”. Principle Four is: “NHS services must reflect the needs and preferences of patients, their families and their carers. Patients, with their families and carers, where appropriate, will be involved in and consulted on all decisions about their care and treatment.”

The Constitution sets out existing legal rights and responsibilities and makes some new pledges above and beyond those legal rights. These include:

“The NHS will strive to work in partnership with you, your family and carers. (pledge)”

The Constitution sets out six underpinning NHS values, including:

“**Working together for patients.** We put patients first in everything we do, by reaching out to staff, patients, carers, families, communities, and professionals outside the NHS. We put the needs of patients and communities before organisational boundaries.”

Work still to be done on the Constitution:

Recognition of unpaid carers as vital partners in care will require a huge cultural shift within the NHS, so the draft Constitution is only the beginning of a challenging process. The constitution continues the direction of travel towards local decision making in the NHS, so it will be important that the emphasis on carers is not lost at local level in areas where health trusts have not in the past recognised the value of carers.

The issue of confidentiality and data protection has been a stumbling block for carer involvement in the past, with carers often feeling that some NHS staff hide behind confidentiality as a reason for not properly engaging with the information needs of carers, despite those carers often having a 24/7 involvement in the care of their relative. So there is a tension urgently needing to be resolved through more detailed guidance between these two responsibilities given to all NHS staff :

- You have a duty to protect the confidentiality of personal information that you hold.
- You should strive to involve patients, their families and carers in the services you provide.

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers and Royal College of Psychiatrists, in their partnership, *Partners in Care*, produced some valuable resources on information sharing and confidentiality which we would like to see more widely adopted: www.partnersincare.co.uk

We encourage carers and carers’ organisations to raise these issues in responding to the consultation which can be found at: www.dh.gov.uk/consultations

Carers facts

- More than 6 million people in the UK are carers, 1.3m caring 50+ hours per week.
- 2 million people move in and out of caring each year and 1 in 8 of your constituents are carers.

- 175,000 of the six million carers are children, often missing out on school and childhoods in order to care.
- 60% carers leave the workforce due to caring responsibilities; on average, carers retire 8 years early.
- The main carer's benefit is £48.65 for a minimum of 35 hours, equivalent to £1.39 per hour.
- If every Carer stopped caring it would cost the government £87 billion a year.
- 80% of carers say their health suffers from caring

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers and Crossroads Caring for Carers

The Princess Royal Trust for Carers is a national charity that supports over 310,000 carers throughout the UK through a network of Carers' Centres and its interactive websites, www.carers.org and www.youngcarers.net.

Crossroads – Caring for Carers is about giving time - improving the lives of carers by giving them time to be themselves and have a break from their caring responsibilities. Our aim is to provide a reliable service, tailored to meet the individual needs of each carer and the person they are caring for. We have schemes in most parts of England and Wales, which provide a range of services to meet local needs. Over 4.6 million care hours are provided every year to more than 35,000 carers - the equivalent of over 525 years of care. www.crossroads.org.uk

NHS commitments already in the National Carers Strategy 2008

The Constitution closely follows the new National Carers Strategy, *Carers at the heart of 21st century families and communities*, which included the vision that carers “will be supported to stay mentally and physically well and treated with dignity” along with the first substantial NHS budget for carers. It said, “Lord Darzi’s Next Stage Review of the NHS, which will publish its final report in summer 2008, will appropriately reflect the importance of carers being treated as expert partners in the NHS”. The draft Constitution is welcome evidence of the NHS making good on that commitment. NHS commitments in the new Carers Strategy include:

- £150m to PCTs for flexible breaks, meeting the needs of both carers and the people they support.
- Pilots for more joined-up service provision between the NHS, local authorities and the third sector.
- Pilots to improve the support offered by GPs for carers and pilot annual health checks for carers.
- Improving the emotional support offered by central, local government and the third sector to carers.
- Training all professionals, from health to housing, to provide better services and support.

NHS carers priorities from 2011 onwards in the Carers Strategy:

- Consider the need for a lead professional for carers.
- Disseminate models of best practice from various pilots announced in the strategy.
- Consider providing replacement care for carers to attend hospital appointments and screenings;
- Review information sharing legislation, especially in cases where mental capacity is an issue.

Full briefing on the Carers Strategy at www.carers.org

Contact details for policy issues:

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