

Our Carers Charter

If you provide help and support to someone with mental health problems, who is receiving or eligible for support from specialist mental health services, then this Charter is designed to assist you.

1. Your essential role and expertise is recognised, respected and encouraged.

- You should be listened to without bias or prejudice and be taken seriously.
- You should be recognised as someone who is providing support to the person for whom you care.
- You should be treated as someone who has relevant and important knowledge about the person for whom you care.
- All staff should be aware of the distress and anxiety that caring can cause and help you to cope with this.
- You should be invited to give your opinion – this should be respected and valued and, when requested, kept confidential.
- Your views should be taken into account in the decisions about the person for whom you care.
- You should be told how the information you provide will be used. You should be able to choose whether you wish to take on, continue with, or take a break from the role of carer and we will help you to cope with the stress of caring.
- You should be given the opportunity to speak to the psychiatrist or mental health professional by yourself if you choose so you can share any concerns you may have. The time and frequency of this will have to be negotiated making allowance for the fact that the psychiatrist and mental health professional have other work pressures. Only limited information can be given to you about the person you support without their consent.

2. You are given the information and advice that you need to help you provide care.

You should be helped to obtain, within reasonable time, all relevant information that you need to get help and support for yourself and the person for whom you care.

The information should be clear, honest and accurate.

The following should be provided:

- An explanation of the mental health problem affecting the person you care for and where you can go to get more information. If the person you support does not agree with you being given this information you should still be given sufficient detail to enable you to provide effective care.
- Information on the treatment the person is receiving, other treatments that are available, how they work and details of any potential side effects. The person you care for will need to agree to you being given these details but this should not undermine your need for information to enable you to provide effective care.
- Information on services available for the person you care for e.g. voluntary organisations and employment services.

- Details of recognisable signs of relapse and who to contact in an emergency – you should be given a contact number and advice on how best to cope with the effects of mental health problems at critical times such as home leave or after the person you care for has been discharged from hospital.
- What support will be available if you feel you are no longer able to care.
- Information on support groups available to mental health carers and your right to an assessment of your needs.
- Information of training courses for you.
- The information should be provided in a way which is helpful to you. For example: orally, in writing, in your own language, through an interpreting service or in discussion with a mental health professional.
- The Royal College of Psychiatrists has published 'A checklist for families of people with a mental illness' which sets out the sort of questions you may want to ask

3. You are involved in the planning and agreement of the care plan for the person whom you are supporting.

- Your views about the needs of the person for whom you care should be sought and taken into account, even in some situations where the cared for person does not give consent.
- You should be involved in the decision made about you and (with his or her consent) the person for whom you care, including the preparation of the care plan.
- You should always be given information, in sufficient time, to enable you to fulfil your role as a carer.
- Even if the person you care for is unwilling for you to be involved in the planning and agreeing of his or her care, you should be told who to contact in an emergency or in crisis.
- You should be told of your right to a Carers' Assessment under legislation.
- You should be given a copy of the Care Plan of the person for whom you care (with their consent). This should state the responsibilities of all the people who are involved in providing care.
- If you feel that the Care Plan is not working or is improperly implemented, you should be given the opportunity to state your views and to be listened to and be involved in the discussions on the action to be taken to address the problems you have identified.
- When the person you care for is receiving care and treatment in hospital, you should be involved in planning and agreeing the Home Leave Plan, and the Discharge Plan, including the date of discharge.
- So far as is practically possible, meetings should be held at a time that suits you and the person for whom you care.

4. Your individual needs as a carer are recognised, responded to and reflected in the Care Plan.

- All staff should recognise that you may have additional commitments to that of your caring role, such as looking after children or going to work.
- Your ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, sexuality, physical ability, age and other characteristics should be respected and taken into account but without general assumptions being made about you.
- If you require assistance in communicating your views, you should be given the appropriate assistance. For example, if English is not your first language, you should be assisted by a qualified interpreter.

A Carer's Assessment should:

- If you so wish, be carried out separately from the assessment of the needs of the person for whom you provide care.
- Allow you to have someone to support you while the assessment is taking place.
- Give you the opportunity to assess your own needs.
- Assess your needs without the assumption being made that you are willing or able to take on a caring role or to continue to provide the same level of care.
- Consider how your caring role affects your relationship with other family members and friends and your ability to maintain employment.
- Address your own health and well-being, your need for emotional and other support and how you would like to be helped in providing care.
- Consider whether you would like to take a break from caring and if so, look at what type of support you think would enable you to do this including the option of Direct/Personalisation Payment.
- When you have a Carers' Assessment you should be given a copy of your assessment and carer's action plan.
- You should have your needs regularly reviewed, as circumstances require, but at least annual and, if you so wish, this should be carried out separately from the review of the needs of the person for whom you care.

5. You receive appropriate help and support when you need it.

- You should be told of your rights to a Carer's Assessment and/or to be provided with sufficient information to assist you in your caring role.
- You should be told who to contact if you need help and to know that your request will be responded to within a reasonable time.
- Your contribution should be valued and incorporated into planning, development and evaluation of services.
- Where plans such as hospital admission are being considered, you and the person you care for should be given the opportunity to consider alternative care.
- You should be given information about what to do and whom to contact in time of crisis.
- You should be told about opportunities to take a break from caring and practical help that could be provided to enable this.
- You should be given details of local support groups.
- You should be helped to get advice about housing, employment issues, financial matters, including entitlement to benefits, and training for carers.
- You should be given a copy of your own Carer's Assessment and Action Plan in a format that you find useful.
- The services that you receive should be of good quality, sustainable, appropriate to your needs and provided within an agreeable time.
- You should be advised on what action to take if you are not happy with the assessment or the decisions made as a result of the assessment or if you think that the Carer's Action Plan is not being implemented properly.

6. You are actively involved in the planning, development and evaluation of services.

- You should be given the opportunity to state your views on the quality of the services provided and on the range of services which need to be developed.
- You should be told how your views will be taken into account as part of an ongoing evaluation of services.
- Your contribution should be valued and incorporated into planning, development and evaluation of services.

- When families and carers attend meetings and undertake other work to assist with the planning, development and evaluation of Trust services, they should be offered payment for their time and travel costs. This is possible through registration with the Trust's Involvement Register.
- You should be given adequate notice of meetings, consultation periods and other relevant events.
- You should be told how the information you provide will be used.
- You can be involved in the planning, development and evaluation of services. If you attend meetings you can receive an agreed payment to cover expenses and travel via the Involvement Register.

7. You are aware of the roles and responsibilities that exist within the care partnership.

It is important to know what you can expect of services and to get what you are entitled to. By working in partnership service providers, people who use our services and other carers will strive to deliver the best results.

Put simply, a partnership is collaboration between different organisations and individuals to achieve common goals. It is expected that sometimes the goals or ways of achieving them may differ, however whilst striving for this collaboration we should:

- Treat each other with courtesy and respect.
- Listen to each other.
- Recognise that all opinions are valid and there will be differing opinions.
- Respect your confidentiality unless it affects the vulnerability of the patient and safeguarding issues affecting the person you care for.
- Tell service providers about how we can improve our services and this charter through ongoing carer involvement in mental health service partnership forums and other generic consultation processes.
- If you have concerns about elements of care received by the person you care for, you should discuss them with the care team, care team manager or, if needed, engage the South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust complaints procedure.
- Concerns/complaints should be responded to and clear explanations given. You should be kept informed of process and procedure.

Reference

The original version of this document, 'Valuing Carers – The Mental Health Carers Charter' was published in 2001 by the Carers Advisory Group for Mental Health in London. It was reissued by the National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE) in 2004.

For more information please visit www.slam.nhs.uk/carers.