Supporting Carers: An action guide for general practitioners and their teams

This resource is a collaboration between the Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) and The Princess Royal Trust for Carers. It has been developed with the help of Sheffield University and over twenty GP practices who have piloted and evaluated some of the resources.

The number of carers in the UK is increasing as the population ages and people with disabilities and serious illnesses live longer and are more likely to live at home. This means that home-based and community-based care will rely increasingly on the participation of family and community members as carers. Both health and social care budgets are under growing pressure and the availability of the paid care workforce is declining.

GPs and their teams are usually the first place that carers have contact with the NHS. They are uniquely placed to recognise that someone is, or is about to become, a carer. In some areas, GPs are already the gateway to the huge range of support available to carers. This resource is intended to demonstrate how GPs are already providing support and suggests practical help with action planning to build on your existing good practice.

By using this resource your practice will be able to ensure that:

- The carers who use your practice are recognised and acknowledged.
- Carers, and those they care for, are in better health.
- Your resources are deployed more effectively.
- Sustainable caring is supported, thus reducing the need for secondary and residential care.
- You gain the maximum possible benefit from other services in your area.

This resource helps you to do this by:

- Raising awareness within your team and developing an action plan.
- Pooling your team’s knowledge and skills to build on your existing good practice.
- Putting in place systems for identifying carers at the earliest possible stage.
- Identifying and linking to agencies that can help you support carers.
- Supporting employees who are carers.
- Evidencing and sharing your good practice with colleagues nationally.

How to use this resource

We hope that practices at any stage of their carers support services development will find this resource useful.

What this resource includes

- Suggested action and discussion points.
- PowerPoint resources for chapters 1 to 5 to be used to raise awareness and encourage discussion within your team.
- The Self Assessment Checklist.
- An invitation to provide feedback online from your own learning and good practice so that this resource continues to develop and grow.
The partnership between The Princess Royal Trust for Carers and the Royal College of General Practitioners has been an extremely informative and productive relationship for both organisations.

It is estimated that 6,000 people take on caring responsibilities every day. Caring can take its toll both physically and emotionally, with the carer’s own health and well-being suffering as a consequence of their caring responsibilities. It is vital that carers are identified and supported at the earliest stage possible so that they have access to the support needed. GPs are often the first point of contact which is why they and their practice teams play an invaluable role in the daily lives of carers.

This text clearly illustrates some of the excellent work carried out by GPs, their practice teams and local carers’ centres. Since launching the guide in October 2007, I have been impressed with the dedication and the enthusiasm demonstrated in order to deliver a product of the highest standard. The end result, Supporting Carers: An action guide for general practitioners and their teams, is a first class piece of work which I hope that you will find extremely useful.

I am confident that this guide will help develop a greater understanding of the issues and support needs surrounding carers. This will not only raise awareness of carers, but it will also encourage knowledge-sharing and learning, all of which will help to improve further support and understanding that carers so desperately need.

Foreword from
The President of The Princess Royal Trust for Carers

HRH The Princess Royal
The relationship between carer and GP practice is a special one and should be recognised as a partnership in care.

GPs and our colleagues in the primary healthcare team can support carers by making them aware of their own health needs, supporting them emotionally and practically and providing useful information.

GPs require accurate information if they are to make efficient diagnoses and carers provide that vital link between patient and doctor. Through their day-to-day relationship with the person they are caring for, the carer is likely to know more about the patient's symptoms than any other professional and is well placed to advise of any changes in the person's condition. This enables the GP to tailor their advice and support.

An estimated 10% of a practice population are carers and there are many more “hidden” carers who for one reason or another are not getting the services and support they need.

The action guide will help GPs and primary care team reflect on the services and care they offer to carers and encourage practical improvements, as well as helping the carer feel supported and valued. It has been designed so as not to create extra work or bureaucracy and we hope it will have a marked impact on the levels of support and services healthcare professionals can provide for carers.

The guide also supports the continuing education of GPs so that doctors can more easily identify patient carers and be aware of their needs.

We hope it will lead to tangible results and new ways of working within the primary healthcare team but perhaps most importantly, it will put carers at the top of the health agenda - where they rightfully belong.
Introduction from
Sandy Gower FRCGP (Hon)
Member of the Steering Group

This guide is arguably our biggest step forward to date in improving healthcare and services for carers.

It will enable the practice to monitor the individual carer’s situation and identify problems or issues at an early stage, ensuring that appropriate healthcare, support and information is provided for the carer, as well as the person they are caring for.

It will also enable the practice to share, with consent, information with other agencies, professionals and support networks so that they can prioritise and integrate their services for the benefit of carers. Crucially, the carer may be registered with a different practice from the patient they are looking after and this will mean that, with the carer’s permission, the practices can communicate and co-ordinate information more effectively.

The guide has been designed so that it can be used by all members of the practice team, allowing different viewpoints and ideas to be taken into account. It focuses on teamwork – with carers as a vital part of that team - and this can only lead to positive results for carers, the patients they are caring for and the practice team.

Sandy Gower
Supporting Carers: An action guide for General Practitioners and their teams

1. Who are carers?
   - Defining a carer
   - Key statistics about carers in the UK
   - What do carers do?
   - The health and well-being of carers – the facts
   - Carers’ own access to primary care
   - Calculating the number of carers in your practice population
   - Young Carers

2. What are the benefits to your patients and practice in developing your work with carers?
   - Why put resources into supporting carers?
   - Partners in care
   - Supporting carers who work for your practice
   - The evidence base for supporting carers through primary care
   - What are the benefits to your patients and practice in developing your work with carers?

3. What’s the policy context?
   - The recent gains for carers
   - Vital Signs and the new National Stroke Strategy
   - Hospital discharge and other health and social care interfaces
   - End of Life Care
   - Personalised support
   - The policy challenges
   - The new National Carers Strategy 2008
   - Young Carers

Contents list
4. Developing your action plan
   - Finding and recognising carers
   - Identify a Carers Lead
   - Providing information for carers
   - Dealing with confidentiality issues
   - Supporting carers within your practice
   - Contacting Carers’ Centres
   - Helping carers access other services
   - Planning for emergencies
   - Carers from communities that may be overlooked or hard to reach
   - Supporting young carers
   - What to do where no Carers’ centre exists

5. What examples are there of General Practice teams working to support carers?

6. Where to find more information and support for your work with carers

7. Sharing and celebrating your support for carers
   - Contribute your good practice example to this guide
   - Using the Self Assessment Checklist
   - Carers in Employment Charter
   - Carers Support Policy

Contributors to be thanked
References