



Supporting Carers

10 Steps
to better practice



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Welcome

to Supporting Carers in 10 Steps

Life in general practice is very busy for everyone in the health care team; there are many competing agendas and deadlines and this means that sometimes momentum for an initiative can fall away when the 'next thing' comes along. But carers are here to stay. More and more people want to remain living in the community even when faced with really difficult challenges and we rely on the support that their relatives and friends can give them.

Clearly people who do the caring also need support to help maintain their own health and wellbeing and alleviate the everyday stresses they can encounter while looking after someone. Carers tell us that they want to be seen as partners with other members of the health care team. They also report that seemingly simple changes can make a big difference and that's what this guide is about. The 10 steps are here to ensure that health care teams acknowledge the important role carers play and direct them to appropriate support because for many people the GP practice is where they first look for help.

Some practices have already implemented the 10 steps and the guide draws on this good practice, giving examples and suggestions. However, as with all initiatives, the good practice needs to be embedded so that it becomes part of the everyday routine. There are many agencies across Knowsley providing services for carers and the five minutes it takes to point someone in the right direction is a small step that can make a big difference. Supporting carers is a job for the whole team and I hope that you'll join me and the carers and staff who have produced this guide in trying to make local GP practices in Knowsley places where carers feel valued as partners in care.

Dr Gillian West

on behalf of the Supporting Carers Practice Group

Introduction

Caring for someone can be a rewarding but also challenging. The aim of this booklet is to provide guidance to primary care staff in their efforts to support carers in GP practices. Taking **Supporting Carers: An action guide for general practitioners and their teams** (First Edition) as a starting point, primary care staff, including practice managers, receptionists and practice nurses, have worked alongside carers and staff from Knowsley Carers Centre to produce this locally relevant, guidance booklet. The production of the guide has been closely followed and warmly supported by the Mid-Mersey Local Medical Committee which has 'accepted and supported the document in its entirety'. Practice staff will find that the steps suggested in the guide support the 2012/13 Quality Outcome Framework (QOF) indicators for carers.

Our aim has been to produce a guide that is accessible and relevant to everyone in the health care team and one that responds to the very clear requests that carers from across Knowsley have made about what support they are looking for from their GP practice. The support carers provide has a very positive impact on the NHS in terms of economic value and there are other benefits too such as the expert knowledge many carers hold about the person they care for. By supporting carers, practice staff will be helping to maintain the health and wellbeing of both the carer and the person they are looking after thus alleviating rather than increasing the work load.

Carers are individuals and no one model will suit all but there are basic things that practices can do that will go some way to meeting the needs of carers when they approach their GP practice or that of the cared for person. This booklet outlines ten simple steps that practices can employ to help ensure that carers feel valued and supported.

What do we mean by 'carer'?

A carer is a person of any age, adult or child, who provides unpaid support to a partner, child, relative or friend who couldn't manage to live independently or whose health or wellbeing would deteriorate without this help. This could be due to frailty, disability or serious health condition, mental ill health or substance misuse.

This definition includes parents of disabled children, young people and sibling carers (under 18 years of age) (The Princess Royal Trust).

Young carers are children and young people under the age of 18 years, who provide care to a family member who has a physical illness or disability, mental ill health, a sensory disability or a drug or alcohol problem.

Why do Primary Care staff need to support carers?

The NHS benefits greatly from the contribution made by 'patients who are carers' as these carers help NHS staff better understand the needs of the person they are looking after and provide much of the vital care that is required.

Many carers report that the invaluable role they play in supporting the cared for person isn't always recognised. Often, carers experience stress and depression due to the strains of their caring role as well as an impact on their physical health. If you add to this a lack of easily accessible and available information about how to properly support the person they are caring for, many are understandably left feeling frustrated, isolated and angry with local health providers.

As carers have so much contact with their local practices, primary care staff and GP's are considered to be the very people who should be playing a key role in identifying carers and signposting them to specialist support. All carers have a right to a life of their own and practice staff, very often hold the key to making this a reality.

Things to remember

- Carers may not recognise themselves as such, to most, it's just what you do as a parent, partner, relative or friend. Asking someone, 'Are you a carer?' may be met with a blank look as sometimes the term 'carer' is confused with 'care worker'; someone who works for a care agency. Alternatively, some people think that to be a carer you must be carrying out your caring role for a specific number of hours each week. Asking the question, 'Are you looking after someone?', when speaking to an individual visiting the practice as a patient or to collect a prescription is more likely to open up a discussion enabling you to signpost the individual to appropriate support.
- One in ten of the population are carers and over a million of these provide care to someone for over 50 hours a week.
- Young carers are children and young people under the age of 18 years, who provide care to a family member who has a physical illness or disability, mental ill health, a sensory disability or a drug or alcohol problem. It is very difficult for children and young people to recognise their own needs as a young carer.
- Carers are here to stay. As longevity increases and people want to remain living in the community, we are all likely to find ourselves in the role of being someone's carer at sometime.
- Remember that not all caring is physical or practical support. For some individuals supporting someone who has a mental health problem, caring might mean always being available on the end of a telephone.
- There are many competing agendas in GP practices but supporting carers helps to alleviate rather than increase the work load. Supporting carers will help them to maintain their own physical, mental and emotional health and this can only have a beneficial impact on the people they care for.
- Many carers have a job outside the home as well as providing hours of care to a loved one. Remember that some of your colleagues are carers and will greatly appreciate your understanding of the difficulties they face.

Step 1

Treat carers as partners

Very often, the carer holds more information about the cared for person than anyone else. All too often, however, carers report that their knowledge and wishes are disregarded by professionals and other staff working in the health and social care field. Carers have made the simple request that they are treated as partners in trying to achieve what's best for the cared for person. It is a simple request but during the busy everyday life of the practice setting, it requires an effort from everybody to ensure that the carer's voice is heard. Carers have identified the 10 steps listed in this guide as a means to recognising the impact they have on the wellbeing of the patient and in supporting them as expert partners in care.

Good practice

Consult with your carers. Find out from them how the practice can best meet their needs.

Involve carers in your Patient Participation Group, they can work with staff to raise the profile of carers both in the practice and the community.

Practice experience

The GP Link Worker from Knowsley Carers Centre was invited to address the Patient Participation Group at the Aston practice at Manor Farm. Now the PPG members are able to assist with checking that the carers' notice board is up to date and carers' leaflets are on display. They are also exploring ways in which they can raise the profile of carers in the practice and encourage carers to come forward and take up the services that are available.

Step 2

Identify carers

Continue to identify who your carers are and maintain your carers register. Practices already use **Read Codes** to do this but it's important that everyone in the practice understands the value of holding a carers register. In a clinical situation, knowing that an individual is a carer may be an important part of the jig-saw in helping the clinician to understand their health needs. Identifying and registering carers also helps practices to monitor who has been signposted to other services that support carers. Some carers may experience particular difficulties in accessing appropriate information and support, for example carers from Black and minority ethnic communities, (BME), carers who are disabled, those looking after someone with mental health problems or misusing substances. You may be the only person to take the time to signpost a carer to services that provide support.

Good practice

Use the practice registration form to identify carers by asking, 'Are you looking after someone?' The question can be framed in other ways such as, 'Do you look after someone who needs help? Carers identified in this way can then be asked if they wish their contact details to be forwarded to Knowsley Carers Centre.

Practice nurses and health care assistants can include the same questions in clinical reviews for blood pressure checks, diabetes clinics, flu vaccination etc.

Help to identify carers by periodically printing a global message on to prescriptions. The message can ask the recipient, 'Are you looking after someone?' Ask carers to identify themselves to staff so that they can be directed to appropriate services.

Practice experience

Pam Simpson at Cornerways Medical Centre says, 'Identifying and putting the carers' register together has been a team effort from frontline staff to clinicians, all members of the team have been educated and regularly updated.

Carer awareness training sessions have been a great help and have given the foundation for better understanding of the carer's needs and helped the Practice identify areas for change. As a practice, we intend to continue to identify carers in our practice.'

At Dr Aung's practice in Whiston Primary Care Resource Centre a room was provided so that individuals could be invited in to a timed appointment with a carer support worker from Knowsley Carers Centre. Carers may feel more comfortable seeking support through the practice rather than going directly to a carer support agency. As a result of providing this facility a number of carers who had previously had no support were put in touch with appropriate services.

Knowsley Carers Centre would be happy to arrange an outreach event that best suits the particular practice environment. Contact us on 0151 549 1412.

Step 3

Signpost to carers' services

There are many services available across the borough to meet the needs of carers. By signposting a carer to Knowsley Carers Centre you will be providing a gateway not only to the many services provided by this particular agency, but from a host of other organisations that work in partnership with the Centre. Unfortunately for many carers, addressing their own needs is low on their agenda. Your offer to put them in touch with an appropriate agency may be the first time anyone has asked the carer if they need any support. This is certainly the experience of many carers consulted in the production of this booklet.

Good practice

Ensure that all staff in the practice know how to contact appropriate agencies and who will deal with requests for referral.

For children and young people

If there are Safeguarding concerns about a child or young person under the age of 18 years, you can discuss your concerns by contacting the Knowsley Access Team between the hours 9am-5pm Mon-Fri on 443 2600.

Out of hours: between 5pm and 9am every week day, weekends and public holidays, the Knowsley Access Team can be contacted on 443 2600.

Knowsley Young Carers supports young carers and their families who live in Knowsley. This might include help with school, health checks, breaks from caring or someone to talk to. Age appropriate health information is also available from the project.

To make a referral to Knowsley Young Carers telephone 443 5785.

For Adults

If there are Safeguarding concerns about a vulnerable adult contact the Knowsley Access Team on 443 2600.

Knowsley Carers Centre

If an individual confirms that they are looking after someone, ask for consent to pass their contact details to Knowsley Carers Centre or another appropriate carer support agency. People often take leaflets away but don't act upon the information until there's a crisis. It benefits both carers and staff if carers have early access to information and support. On receipt of a referral, a carer support worker will contact the carer within three working days to offer information and advice.

An electronic version of Knowsley Carers Centre referral form is available in practices. For a copy, contact Knowsley Carers Centre on 549 1412.

Carers Assessments

Carers maybe entitled to a Carers Assessment to look at their needs independently of the cared for person. To request a Carers Assessment contact the Knowsley Access Team on 443 2600. Staff at Knowsley Carers Centre can provide more information to carers about accessing a Carers Assessment.

Practice experience

Debbie Guy at Roby Practice told us, 'I find that carers are initially reluctant to access a break for themselves. Knowing about the services available, I've been able to encourage and advise some of our patients that they need time for themselves without feeling guilty about taking it. One patient I referred has benefitted greatly from attending a coffee morning/support group and came into the practice to say how glad she was.'

Step 4

Appoint and support your carer link

Appointing and supporting a member of staff as a Carer Link will help to keep carers on the agenda at all times. It is everyone's responsibility to support carers but the role of the Carer Link is to maintain contact with Knowsley Carers Centre to ensure that information about services is available and up to date as well as raising the profile of carers in the practice. Carer Links can play an important role reminding practice staff to think of carers as partners when making decisions about how the practice carries out its day to day work. The Carer and GP Connect Group at Knowsley Carers Centre meets quarterly providing a forum to support Carer Links in their role and to enable carers and practice staff to share an agenda of interest to both parties.

Good practice

Display the name of your Carer Link clearly in the practice.

Provide protected time for your Carer Link to attend training and carer link forums.

Ensure that there is always someone available who knows about carers' issues.

Practice experience

Jackie Allstair, Carer Link on reception at Dr Tewari's practice says, 'Being the Carer Link has helped me to raise awareness in the practice. I was a carer when I was young and I now realise that with all the services available being a carer doesn't have to be such a lonely place. Raising awareness has put the practice in touch with a lot more of the available services. I know I can get information when I need it. Both patients and staff feel comfortable coming to one named person who can find out about services. It helps to break down the barriers to seeking help.'

Step 5

Provide information

Many practices already have carers' notice boards. Keep your notice board up to date by maintaining links with Knowsley Carers Centre. Together we can ensure that information available to carers is relevant, up to date and presented well. Practices in buildings that have information free walls can explore other options such as making an information folder available for carers in the waiting area.

Good practice

Positioning a selection of carers' leaflets near to the carers' notice board will create an easily recognisable area for carers to which they can be directed by staff. A range of information leaflets are available from Knowsley Carers Centre on 549 1412.

Use your practice leaflet to tell carers how the practice aims to support carers.

If a young carer needs age appropriate information about a health problem, Knowsley Young Carers are able to assist on 443 5785.



Pictured here is Emma beside the carers' notice board at Wingate Medical Centre.

Step 6

Develop your carer awareness through training

A menu of training opportunities to meet the practice's needs is available from Knowsley Carers Centre. Training can be delivered on site if protected time can be made available or at Knowsley Carers Centre where a full days' training allows for a more in depth coverage of issues. Having time away from the practice to reflect on issues relating to carers helps staff appreciate the day to day reality of life as a carer. Learning about the services that are available to support carers increases the confidence of staff members when engaging with individuals and signposting to appropriate agencies.

Good practice

Plan your carer awareness training. Training events at Knowsley Carers Centre are spread throughout the year so that busy practices can be accommodated by a rolling programme. Onsite training can be provided if protected time is arranged.

Ensure that basic carer awareness training is built in to the induction process for all staff. Reading this leaflet is a first step.

Practice experience

At Dina's Lane Medical Centre, a big busy practice, Pat Puddifer, the Practice Manager has staggered staff training over the past two years so that now over half of the reception staff have attended carer awareness training sessions. Staff regularly contact Knowsley Carers Centre to update their supply of leaflets and have been very supportive about holding outreach events in the practice.

Step 7

Take care of carers' physical and mental health

Given the busy lives carers lead, it's not surprising to discover that their health needs often go unchecked. Around 40% of carers experience psychological distress and many carers experience strain and back problems as a result of their caring role. Time constraints and focus on the cared for person means that often problems are undiagnosed and therefore remain unresolved. As well as signposting carers to support services for information and advice, health practitioners can help to make sure that carers are fully aware and able to take advantage of health checks and screening programmes that are appropriate for them. In some practices, nationally, annual health checks for carers are offered but there are other programmes that carers may also benefit from if time is taken to identify their needs.

Good practice

Whenever you see a carer with a patient, it is always worth asking the carer how he or she is. This may alert you to carer health problems or the need to signpost to additional support.

Encourage carers to take up offers of health screening services that are available such as breast and bowel cancer screening, cervical screening and diabetic clinics.

Encourage carers on your carer register to attend for vaccination with personalised invitations.

Put a notice up in the practice inviting carers to attend for influenza vaccination.

Step 8

Provide information for emergencies

Often carers are worried about what will happen if they are taken ill or if another emergency occurs. Who will care for the person they look after? Will anyone even realise that their relative has been left unsupported.

Carers report how desperately frustrated and isolated they can feel when trying to deal with an emergency out of hours.

A great deal of stress can be avoided by making sure carers are informed about how to plan for emergencies and what to do when the surgery is closed.

Good practice

Information about accessing out of hours services can be provided in the practice leaflet and posted on the carers' notice board.

The Carer's Emergency Card Leaflet should be available in all practices as well as details about arranging an emergency plan via the Knowsley Access Team. Contact Knowsley Carers Centre for more information about accessing a carer's assessment and planning for emergencies.

Step 9

Assist carers with negotiating confidentiality issues

Carers who are doing their best to manage very challenging situations can feel very frustrated when they are denied information about the cared for person that they believe will help them in their caring role. Staff in GP practices however, have a duty to maintain patient confidentiality and therefore sharing information with a carer can only be done with the consent of the patient.

Good practice

It will go some way to alleviating tensions if carers are made aware that there are protocols within the practice to help negotiate a way through this difficult area. Use the practice leaflet to inform your carers that these protocols exist.

For example many carers do not know that practices can gain consent from the patient which will then allow them to share information with the carer.

Sometimes generally available information about certain medical conditions will greatly assist the carer in looking after the cared for person.

The physical environment in the practice should be given due consideration for both patients and carers alike. Is it possible to conduct a discussion with a receptionist in privacy? Screens, tensa barriers and side rooms offer some solutions but many practices find resolving this problem difficult. Nevertheless, it is a reasonable request to expect to be able to discuss confidential issues in a private environment.

This is a complex area and it therefore makes sense to make carers aware of existing protocols.

Step 10

Consider the needs of carers when designing internal practice procedures and systems

Something as seemingly simple as attending an appointment or collecting a prescription can present real challenges for people who are caring for someone. Carers experience difficulties because:

- The changing behaviour patterns or support needs of the person being cared for makes it difficult for a patient who is a carer to pre-book appointments as there is no guarantee that they will be able to leave the person being cared for at the arranged time.
- The carer may need to arrange alternative care to enable them to attend and there may be a limit on the time the carer can be away from the caring situation.
- If the carer needs to bring the person they are caring for with them to the surgery, long waiting times can also be very distressing.
- Many carers feel unable to ask for help.

Just as people going out to work need a wide range of options where practice systems are concerned, so too do carers who are often carrying out many different tasks in and outside the home to help maintain the health and wellbeing of the person they care for.

Good practice

It helps carers if practice staff alert them to the arrangements that can be made to meet their needs. Practice staff may wish to consider

- Can a double appointment be made if required?
- Could a greater degree of flexibility about appointment times be afforded to meet the carer's needs?

- Is there a more private space available in the practice where the carer and cared for person can wait if the cared for person is distressed?
- Is best use made of the technologies available to assist carers in the re ordering of prescriptions

Use your practice leaflet and carers notice board to inform carers about the provision that can be made to meet their needs.

The practice team can use the following check list to evaluate the progress made in implementing the 10 steps.

Good practice assessment check list

- | | | |
|--------------------------|--|-------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Describe how you recognise carers as partners and seek their views on practice matters. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Describe the approaches you use to identify patients who are carers and the carers of your patients. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | We signpost our carers to carer support agencies and monitor this activity. | Y / N |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | How is this done and who is responsible for passing on contact details? | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | We hold a carers' register which is regularly updated. | Y / N |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | We have an appointed carer link whose name is displayed in the practice. | Y / N |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | There is always someone on hand at the practice with knowledge of carers' issues. | Y / N |
| | How do you provide carers with information? | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | • We have a notice board with up to date information. | Y / N |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | • We have a dedicated Carers' Notice board with up to date carers' information. | Y / N |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | • We provide a range of leaflets for our carers in a clearly identified location. | Y / N |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | • Information about emergency planning and out of hours services is available and on display in the practice. | Y / N |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | • Describe other ways you provide carers/patients with information. | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | We have an established protocol to deal with confidentiality issues that is available to all our patients, including carers. | Y / N |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | We have an ongoing carer awareness training plan to meet the needs of our staff. | Y / N |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Describe how the needs of carers are taken into account in your internal practice procedures and systems. | |

When the practice is able to evidence all of the above contact Jan Box at Knowsley Carers Centre for more details about the Carers' Certification Scheme.

A menu for Carer Awareness Training is also available.

Contact Jan Box, GP Link Worker for more details and information about carers' services on 549 1412.

You can also get this information in other formats. Please phone Customer Services on 0151 443 4031.

