

# Common-sense Confidentiality

A guide for staff, carers, family and friends

## **Introduction**

This leaflet provides advice and guidance to staff, carers, family and friends on how information can be shared by the <sup>2</sup>gether NHS Foundation Trust.

## **The importance of sharing information with carers**

We recognise that if someone is caring for a friend or family member the sharing of information between staff, and carer is vital to the care and treatment of a friend or relative.

Providing information about care plans and medication, and advice on managing a crisis, may be able to help someone deal with difficult situations.

## **Issues in sharing information**

Healthcare is a partnership between patients, families and professional care staff. Sometimes there can be difficulties in relation to confidentiality and sharing information. There is overwhelming evidence which indicates and demonstrates that involving carers and families in the treatment of service users has much improved outcomes for the service user (and the carer).

When a service user wishes to withhold information then these wishes must be respected by professional staff. It is essential that carers are informed of this. Staff should ensure that Carers receive as much information as possible to help them in their caring role.

As an area of good practice staff will:

- Discuss with the service user what particular information they wish to withhold.
- Discuss the importance of confidentiality with carers at an early stage and that views on information sharing are recorded.
- Explain to carers what information can be shared and if information cannot be shared, the reasons for this.
- Explain they are bound by law and professional codes of conduct and have a duty of confidentiality to their service users.

Staff will also explain that they have the same duty of confidentiality to carers in relation to any information they wish to discuss.

## **How can information be shared?**

Issues around confidentiality should not be used as a reason for not talking to carers about their own needs, not listening to them or for not discussing fully with service users the need for carers to receive information so that they can continue to support them. Carers should be given enough information in a way that they can readily understand to help them to provide care effectively. The expectation is that staff can do this and still respect confidentiality.

Even when the service user continues to withhold consent, carers must be given enough knowledge to enable them to provide effective care. Opportunities to discuss any difficulties carers are experiencing in their caring role should be offered by the service user's care team, who should make contact with carers at an early stage.

If in doubt staff should seek advice from their supervisor or appropriate colleague.

## The provision of general information

The provision of general information about mental illness, emotional and practical support does not breach confidentiality.

General information can include:

- Information about the condition and the behaviour it may cause.
- Advice on managing the behaviour, particularly in a crisis situation.
- Contact details of the care co-ordinator.
- Background information on medication, possible side effects and resources about medication see <http://www.choiceandmedication.org/2gether/>
- Information about the Care Programme Approach and what it involves.
- Contact details for local and national support organisations.

## The Carers Charter

In line with the principles of the <sup>2</sup>gether NHS Trust Carers Charter and Triangle of Care good practice standards the following approaches are being developed and implemented:

- Information on confidentiality and information sharing will be given to service users and carers and discussed at the earliest stage, usually during assessments and then at reviews.
- Staff will help service users to distinguish between sensitive and personal issues, which are to remain confidential, and more general information about the illness which can be shared.
- Issues regarding confidentiality will be recorded in the service user's notes so that all staff are aware of any changes in the service user's attitude regarding confidentiality.
- The use of "Advance Statements" will be developed and encouraged. These allow service users to plan their care when they are well, and explaining what they would like to happen if they become unwell.
- Staff will help service users to understand the benefits of sharing appropriate information with their carer.
- The care co-ordinator will provide carers with the support and help needed on issues relating to information sharing and confidentiality.
- Carers should feel welcome to ask questions and time should be made available to answer questions.
- Professionals will involve carers in treatment plans and in major decisions about the patient.

## Further support

Opportunities for carers and service users to learning more about carers rights and confidentiality and carers can also be accessed through local organisations (contact details below)

## Good practice checklist

The following checklist has been taken from the “Carers and Confidentiality in Mental Health” leaflet produced by the Partners in Care campaign and published by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. It is designed to assist staff to work closer with carers within the boundaries of current legislation and to help carers understand their rights.

Carers are given general factual information, both verbal and written about:

- The diagnosis.
- What behaviour, or emotion is likely to occur and how to manage it.
- Medication – benefits and possible side-effects.
- Local in-patient and community services.
- The Care Programme Approach (CPA).
- Local and national support groups.

Carers are helped to understand:

- The present situation
- Any confidentiality restrictions requested by the patient.
- The service user’s treatment plan and its aims.
- Written care plans, crisis plan or recovery programme.
- The role of each professional involved in the service user’s care.
- How to access help, including out of hours services.

Carers are given:

- The opportunity to see a professional on their own.
- The right to their own confidentiality when talking to a professional.
- Encouragement to feel a valued member of the care team.
- Confidence to voice their views and any concerns they may have.
- Information to access their own emotional and practical support.
- Help to access an assessment of their own needs with their own written support plan (i.e. if the service user has a serious mental illness or learning disability).

## Organisation details

Carers Gloucestershire: 35 St Michaels Square, Gloucester, GL1 1HX, 01452 386283

Gloucestershire Young Carers: 7 Twigworth Court Business Centre, Twigworth, Gloucester GL2 9PG, 01452 733060

Herefordshire Carers Support: Berrows Business Centre, Bath Street, Hereford, HR1 2HE 01432 356068

***With thanks to the Patient Information Centre Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust for generously sharing their original documentation with us.***