

## **Partners in Care Campaign**

### **Birmingham and Solihull Roadshow – 19 October 2004**

The Partners in Care campaign is the current campaign of the President of the Royal College of Psychiatry, Dr Mike Shooter, and the Princess Royal Trust for Carers. The aim of the campaign is to highlight carers' issues and to improve services that carers receive. The Meriden Programme, West Midlands Carers in Partnership and the West Midlands Division of the Royal College of Psychiatrists are supporting each Trust across the West Midlands to hold an event to highlight the campaign.

The first Partners in Care event in the West Midlands took place on Tuesday, 19 October in Birmingham and was attended by 77 people. The mix of professionals, service users, carers and carers support workers created a lively debate to say the least, and will have left a lasting impression on all those who attended. A range of issues was raised, many relevant to the way in which services are provided to carers by statutory agencies.

Dermot McGovern, Chair, West Midlands Division of Royal College of Psychiatrists, who is also a Psychiatrist in Birmingham, chaired the event, and outlined the background to the campaign. 26 carers along with 12 psychiatrists and 39 other professionals attended the event and heard Sue Turner, Chief Executive of Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health NHS Trust, talk about how services are provided for carers. She acknowledged that there was a lot of work to be done in this area and that the day would play a major part in moving that process forward. Some of the carers were very vocal in stating that they wanted to be listened to by the service and that this should be happening as a matter of routine rather than having to demand to be heard.

Neil Deuchar, Medical Director, Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust, presented his views on how carers should be included in services, and why this is important. He stated that it was embarrassing that at times, the basic things weren't being delivered to carers and that the Trust would be looking at how to improve services. Again the carers present were asking questions about why services hadn't been better for them, why they weren't getting relevant information at the appropriate time and why their views weren't being listened to.

Gráinne Fadden then presented around policy issues, research base and a general view of carers' experiences, which had a number of carers nodding in agreement and the presentation was roundly applauded. One carer summarised the presentation by saying, "Thank you for expressing our feelings, our emotions and our rights."

Jenny Wyatt and Val Strawford related their experience of caring for a son with psychosis. From both there were incidents related to not being informed or consulted about the care of their loved one and how their views were dismissed, the struggle to cope with a son with a serious mental illness and the impact of this on the family. Both related how positive the impact of Behavioural Family Therapy (BFT) had been on their families. Val told how her family was able to cope with difficult situations that, without the skills gained from BFT, would have led to her son relapsing and being admitted to hospital. Carers asked how they could access BFT and how it would be used in their own circumstances.

Colin Gillings, support worker from Rethink, outlined how carers support groups provided support for carers and how vital this was. Julian Cleaver, Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) Lead, outlined how PALS operated and how carers could access this service to try to overcome difficulties. Julian also said that he would like to get involved in developing a network of carer support services across the Trust.

Following lunch, the attendees were split into four groups and a discussion took place focussing on how communications between carers and professionals could be improved. Each group fed back their ideas for improvement. A range of ideas were put forward, some of which are summarised below.

- **Training**
  - ⇒ All staff should have training in awareness of carers' issues. This includes reception staff, as they are the first point of contact for carers with the service.
  - ⇒ Clear guidelines around confidentiality to be developed.
  - ⇒ Other agencies should have mental health training e.g. General Practitioners, police force, ambulance staff, etc.
  - ⇒ Training should involve carers in its delivery.
- **Services**
  - ⇒ Checklists included in all paperwork to ensure carers are included consistently in care delivery.
  - ⇒ A Carers Lead identified in all localities to act as a contact point for carers.
  - ⇒ Appointment of a Carers Lead Post in a senior position to proactively champion carers issues in the Trust.
  - ⇒ Promote PALS to enable carers to access this service.
  - ⇒ Invest in family work services such as Behavioural Family Therapy.
  - ⇒ Improved communication between teams and departments.
- **Carers Assessments**
  - ⇒ Carer's assessments should be offered consistently, carers shouldn't have to ask for one.
  - ⇒ If care plan refused, the reason should be recorded.
  - ⇒ Carer's assessments should not be done by care co-ordinator.
  - ⇒ Carer's care plan should follow an assessment.
- **Information about mental illness and services available for carers**
  - ⇒ In GP surgeries outlining support available.
  - ⇒ Room in hospitals for carers to use.
  - ⇒ Notice boards in all centres with carer's information.
  - ⇒ On Trust intranet site.
  - ⇒ Information given to carers on a more regular basis.
- **Mental health promotion to tackle stigma.**
  - ⇒ Carers who had experienced the impact of stigma upon their relatives felt this was very important.
- **Carer representation on committees**
  - ⇒ Should be meaningful and not tokenistic.
  - ⇒ Carers and staff need training to make this happen, and carers will need ongoing support with this role.

There were a number of comments that having a regular forum to explore how these issues were progressing would be useful. Many of the carers present said that they had found the day interesting and enjoyable, but that they wanted to see ideas being implemented, and hoped that the day would prove to be meaningful. Reports from the day will be circulated to all those present and an action plan will develop from that.

The feedback from those attending was very positive and everyone who presented and organised the event felt it had been a very constructive day. Carers had strongly expressed their views and their enthusiasm and commitment will serve to progress carers' issues within the Trust. There is a commitment from the Trust to take forward the issues raised. We hope that other events across the region are as stimulating as this one.

If anyone would like to make any further points or would like further information on the day, please contact:

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