

Commonsense Confidentiality

A guide for carers, family and friends

Shining a light on the future



Introduction

This leaflet provides advice and guidance to carers, family and friends on how information can be shared by Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust.

The importance of sharing information with carers

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

Providing you with information about care plans and medication, and advising you on managing a crisis, may be able to help you to deal with difficult situations until other assistance is available.

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. When a patient wishes to withhold information then these wishes must be respected by professional staff. It is essential that you are informed of this. Staff will ensure that you receive as much information as possible to help you in your caring role.

As an area of good practice staff will:

- Discuss with the patient what particular information they wish to withhold.
- Discuss the importance of confidentiality with you at an early stage and that views on information sharing are recorded.
- Explain to you what information can be shared and if information can not 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 patients.

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

How can information be shared?

Issues around confidentiality should not be used as a reason for not listening to you or for not discussing fully with patients the need for you to receive information so that you can continue to support them. You should be given enough information in a way that you can readily understand to help you to provide care efficiently.

Even when the patient continues to withhold consent, you must be given enough knowledge to enable you to provide effective care. You will be given the opportunity to discuss any difficulties you are experiencing in your caring role with the service user's Care Co-ordinator. This must happen from an early stage.

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 and possible side effects.
- Information about the Care Programme Approach and what it involves.
- Contact details for local and national support organisations.

The Carers Charter

In line with Carers Charter the following approaches are being implemented:

- Leaflets 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 patients to distinguish between sensitive and personal issues (for example, about their sexuality), which are to remain confidential, and more general information about the illness, which can be shared.
- Issues regarding confidentiality will be recorded in the patient's notes so that all staff are aware of any changes in the patient's attitude regarding confidentiality.
- The use of "Advance Statements" will be encouraged. These allow patients to plan their care when they are well, 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 must be encouraged to ask questions. Time must be made available to answer questions.
- Professionals will involve carers in treatment plans and in major decisions about the patient.

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 mental health diagnosis
- What behaviour 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 patient’s treatment plan and its aims
- Any written care plan, crisis plan or recovery programme
- The role of each professional involved in the patient’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
- Emotional and practical support
- An assessment of their own needs with their own written care plan (ie if the patient has a serious mental illness or learning disability).

This information can be made available in a range of formats on request (eg Braille, audio, large print, BSL, easy read or other languages). Please contact the Patient Information Centre Tel: 0191 223 2545

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