

Involving unpaid carers in hospital discharge / transfer of care

A guide for healthcare staff



A carer is anyone who cares, **unpaid**, for a friend or family member who due to illness, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction cannot cope without their support. There are more than 310,000 unpaid carers in Wales.

An unpaid carer has the right:

- to be involved in discharge plans that affect them
- to make an informed decision about how much care they are willing and able to provide when someone they care for is discharged from hospital.

There are many benefits to involving unpaid carers during a hospital admission:

- They are a valuable source of information and insight about the patient
- Discharge goes more smoothly when everyone is on the same page
- Carers receive better support and are therefore less likely to reach crisis point
- Better communication with carers means fewer failed discharges or crises after discharge

What about confidentiality?

- Adult patients with mental capacity have the right to decide who is given information
- Make sure the patient has been asked who information can be shared with, understands the reasons for you sharing with their carer(s), understands that they can authorise general updates but can ask for specific information to be withheld
- Make sure that you know who information can be shared with
- Even if the patient hasn't given consent, a carer has the right to information and involvement in decisions that will affect them, sufficient for them to make an informed choice about whether to take on or continue caring responsibilities after discharge

If you're not sure how closely involved someone is or how much they know try using questions like:

What's the last thing you were told?

What changes have you noticed?

This guidance is intended for clinical staff providing day-to-day care only. Clinical staff with service or ward management responsibility should see the more detailed [policy guide](#) instead.

Identifying unpaid carers

- On admission, find out who is involved in a patient's care
- Not everyone identifies with the term 'carer', try asking instead:

Is there someone who helps you at home?

Do you help look after [patient] at home?

Make sure that:

- ✓ Information about any unpaid carers has been recorded on the patient record
- ✓ Permissions have been captured on the patient record

Remember that:

- ✓ Carers can be any age and include many children and young adults
- ✓ Carers may support someone with a learning disability, or mental health or substance use issues, not just people with physical health conditions
- ✓ The patient who has been admitted may be a carer themselves
- ✓ Sometimes two people may be co-carers, i.e. each looking after the other in different ways



Communicating with unpaid carers

Make sure that:

- ✓ You respect the insights that an unpaid carer has about the person they care for
- ✓ Carers are included in the 'What Matters to Me' conversation
- ✓ Carers are told about the level of care a person requires if this has changed
- ✓ Carers receive a copy of the Discharge Plan
- ✓ Carers have information about important 'technical' aspects of care at home, e.g. fluid intake, medicines, moving and handling
- ✓ Carers know what to do if there's a problem
- ✓ You offer to write information down if there's a lot for someone to take in



Preparing for discharge / transfer of care

Unpaid carers who provide care at home need to be involved from admission onwards and kept updated about discharge plans. It is essential that unpaid carers' perspectives are included in MDT discussions – it helps if there's someone with specific responsibility for this.

Follow the steps in the D2RA (Discharge to Recover then Assess) guidance, however make sure that communication with any unpaid carer(s) is given equal weight and attention to communication with the patient to increase the likelihood of a successful discharge.

For all D2RA pathways, check that the carer is aware of support services available in the community to increase the likelihood that they will be able start or to continue providing support.

Supporting unpaid carers

Carers need information about what to expect in the hospital setting and at home – be available to talk to the carer and remember to provide them with any Carer's Guide / Info Pack available. This should cover:

- Their right to a Carers Needs Assessment and how to request this
- Support that is available in their area such as respite or short breaks
- Services that are available in their area, such as the local council or Carers Centre and organisations that provide practical support at home
- Advice lines or support available from national organisations

N.B. A guide specific to your locality is best, but if there isn't one available, there is a one-page sheet for carers available to complement this guide for staff.

Make sure you know who within your service you can refer a carer to for extra support, such as a Carers Officer (job titles may vary in different settings).



What actions can **you** take now to support unpaid carers?

- Sign up for Carer Awareness training
- Watch some of our short [videos](#) about unpaid carers rights & experiences
- Make sure you ask on admission to find out if there is a carer(s) involved
- Make sure unpaid carers are involved in the What Matters conversations
- Give any Carer's Guide / Info Pack materials available in your service
- Make sure carers know they have a legal right to an assessment of their needs
- Make use of an unpaid carer's knowledge in caring for your patient
- Make sure you know who you can and should share information with
- If you can't speak to an unpaid carer at the time due to time pressures, make sure to go back and talk later, or arrange a time to speak
- Find out about support services for unpaid carers in your area
- Find out where this information is kept up to date in your service
- Find out how to refer to the Carers Officer in your service (job titles may vary)
- Consider becoming a Carer's Champion / Lead (role title may vary) yourself within your service

Resources and further information

The Carer Aware project has document and video resources, plus free training for health professionals. Find out more here: carers.org/carers-aware-project

Contact us for further support and information about involving and supporting carers.



Carers Trust Wales

wales@carers.org

0300 772 9702

Carers Wales

info@carerswales.org

029 2081 1370