

# Common sense confidentiality

## A guide for carers, family and friends

*Written in collaboration with carers and staff and including some content reproduced by kind permission of Newcastle, Tyne and Wear Foundation Trust and from Royal College of Psychiatrists Guidance.*

### Introduction

This document provides advice and guidance to carers, family and friends on how information can be shared by Hertfordshire Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust.



### What is a carer?

*'Carers are people who provide help and (unpaid) support to a family member, friend or neighbour who would otherwise not be able to manage. The person they care for may have a physical or learning disability, dementia, mental health problems, may misuse drugs or alcohol or may be ill or frail.'* – HPFT Carer Strategy

### 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, can be vital to the care and treatment of your friend or relative.

Information about care plans and medication, and advice on managing a crisis, may help you to deal with difficult situations until other assistance is available.

### Issues in sharing information

Healthcare is a partnership between patients, carers, families and professional care staff. Sometimes there can be difficulties in relation to confidentiality and sharing information. When a service user wishes to withhold information then these wishes must be respected by professional staff. It is essential that you are informed of this. Staff should aim to ensure that you receive as much information as possible to help you in your caring role.

*'Lack of consent from a service user does not preclude discussion and appropriate and helpful sharing of general non personal information. Every effort should be made by staff to support carers in their caring role, and they should be supported and encouraged to discuss and resolve any concerns or difficulties for them as a carer.'* – HPFT Carer Practice Guide.

# Common sense confidentiality

## **As an area of good practice staff will:**

- Discuss issues of confidentiality with service user and carer at an early stage and ensure that views on information sharing are recorded
- Discuss with the service user any particular information they wish to withhold
- Explain to you what information can be shared and if information cannot be shared the reasons for this
- Explain they are bound by law and professional codes and have a duty of confidentiality to service users
- Explain that they have the same duty of confidentiality to you as a carer in relation to any information that 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 service users 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 provide care.

Even when the service user continues to withhold consent, you should be given enough information to enable you to provide care for them from an early stage. You should be given the opportunity to discuss any difficulties you are experiencing in your caring role with the care coordinator.

## **The provision of general information**

The provision of general information about mental illness, emotional and practical support does not breach confidentiality. Neither does discussion about facts (e.g. diagnosis or medication prescribed) of which the carer is already aware.

### **General information can include;**

- Information about the condition and behaviour it may cause
- Advice on managing behaviour, particularly in a crisis situation
- Contact details of the Care Co-ordinator
- Background information on medication and possible side effects
- Information about Care Programme Approach and what it involves
- Contact details for local and national support organisations.

# Common sense confidentiality

## HPFT's Carer Strategy

Our Carer Strategy (2013 – 18) was developed together with carers and local carer organisations and based in the good practice identified by the Carer's Trust as necessary for Triangle of care accreditation. Both documents are available at [www.hpft.nhs.uk/our-services/carers/](http://www.hpft.nhs.uk/our-services/carers/)

The strategy commits us to the following pledges;

1. Carers and the essential role they play are identified at first contact or as soon as possible thereafter
2. Staff are 'carer aware' and trained in carer engagement strategies
3. Policy and practice protocols re; confidentiality and sharing information are in place
4. Defined roles responsible for carer support are in place and shaped in a way that provides most benefit for carers
5. A carer introduction to the service and staff is available, with a relevant range of information across the care pathway
6. A range of carer support services are available including support for employees of the Trust who are also carers.

## 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 [www.rcpsych.ac.uk](http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk) It is designed to assist staff to work closer with carers within the boundaries of current legislation and to help carers understand their rights.

**Where possible, 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 inpatient 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 service user
- The service user's treatment plan and its aims

# Common sense confidentiality

- Any written care plan, 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
- Emotional and practical support
- An assessment of their own needs.

## **Further information**

- It is the responsibility of all care staff to work in partnership with carers
- Within Hertfordshire, a wide range of carer support and information is provided by Carers in Herts [www.carersinherts.org.uk](http://www.carersinherts.org.uk)
- HPFT's Carer Handbook should be made available to carers as soon as possible after we become aware of them
  - A guide for Young Carers is also available
  - Both above documents available online at [www.hpft.nhs.uk/our-services/carers/](http://www.hpft.nhs.uk/our-services/carers/)

**If you have any questions or comments about this document, or wish to request further copies as a leaflet, the Carer Handbook or Young Carers Guide please contact:**

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