



caring for  
someone  
with a mental  
health illness

The background of the page is composed of several overlapping, semi-transparent geometric shapes. There is a large light purple shape on the left, a yellow shape at the top, a blue shape on the left side, a brownish-gold shape in the center, and a green shape on the right. The text 'caring for someone with a mental health illness' is centered over these shapes. The words 'caring for' are in pink, 'someone' is in dark blue, 'with a' is in dark blue, 'mental' is in light blue, and 'health illness' is in light blue.

*Not always there with you ...but always there for you*



## Caring for someone with a Mental Health Illness

Mental ill-health affects one in four of us at some point in our lives and can cover a range of conditions, from the mild to the severe. Depression, schizophrenia, anxiety, obsessions, phobias as well as misuse of alcohol and drugs are just a few of the most common mental health problems.

Depending on the illness and its seriousness, the help and support provided by you and other friends and family can be of great importance, but do remember that there is only so much you can do; be aware of your limits and the fact that your life is important too.

Discussing the situation with someone you trust can be very helpful. Consulting the GP, psychiatrist, the care coordinator or support worker of the person you are caring for can help to clarify the situation.

The area of confidentiality and information-sharing is an important one for carers and the people with the mental health problems they are looking after. Confidentiality issues can be complex and hard to resolve, not to mention frustrating. You may find yourself feeling that your efforts are not appreciated, as even when you try to

*“My Mum was so ill, she couldn’t take in what the psychiatrist was telling her. If I hadn’t been there to make notes, she would have been in the dark”*

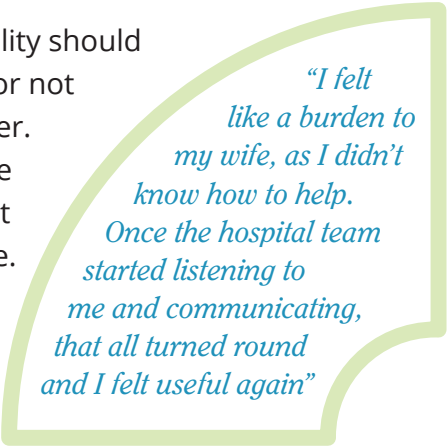
help, you cannot get access to the facts or discuss the case with any of the professionals involved.

The sharing of information may be difficult, but it is crucial that the carer is not excluded from important discussions and decisions involving the patient. This can have serious practical, financial and personal consequences, and also increases feelings of isolation, grief and loss, which are common to many carers.

All professionals working in mental health services are bound by law and professional codes of conduct to a duty of confidentiality to their patients. The most important issue of the agreement to the patient is consent to disclose information to the carer. Many patients and carers are unaware of this and do not realise the patient must give consent before any information can be shared. Complex issues can arise when the patient is unable to give 'informed consent', for example at certain times during an acute episode or when the person has dementia.

Issues around confidentiality should not be used as a reason for not listening to carers, however. Carers should be given the confidence to ask the right questions at the right time.

Under the Mental Health (Care and Treatment) Scotland Act 2003,



*“I felt like a burden to my wife, as I didn't know how to help. Once the hospital team started listening to me and communicating, that all turned round and I felt useful again”*

carers have the following rights:

- To be included on service user's Care Plan.
- To be given general information about the condition of the person cared for.
- To be given a copy of the service user's care plan if (a) service user consents or (b) issues of duty of care or risk override service user objections.
- To be informed of the patient's detention, and the nearest relative's right to discharge the patient, before application under Section 2 – application for assessment.
- If the carer is the 'named person', right to request a needs assessment of the person cared for.
- If the carer is the 'named person', right to appeal on behalf of service user against detention in conditions of excessive security.
- If the carer is the 'named person', they must be consulted before an emergency of short-term detention certificate is issued for the person they care for.
- If the carer is the 'named person', right to seek to have the patient discharged from hospital (giving 72 hours' notice), though the doctor in charge of the patient's care can prevent this action.

### Named Person

If you care for someone with Mental Health issues, they may ask you to help protect their interests if they have to be given care or treatment under the Mental Health (Care

and Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003. The named person will have to be informed and consulted about aspects of their care, and be able to make certain applications.

Anyone aged 16 or over can choose their own named person so long as the witness can certify that they understand the effect of choosing a named person and that they have not been under any undue influence.

### **Advance Statement**

It is also a good idea to discuss confidentiality with the person with the mental health issue when they are well, and agreeing an 'Advance Statement' which needs to be witnessed by a health professional and/or a solicitor.

A booklet is available called 'The New Mental Health Act: A guide to Advance Statements' and is available [www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/26350/0012826.pdf](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/26350/0012826.pdf) or Blackwell's Bookshop (0131 622 8283) for a free copy.

An Advance Statement is a plan about how the person with the mental health disorder would or would not wish to be treated in the future should their mental health become impaired. It may state something like "When I am ill, I may insist my mother has no contact and is not told anything about my health. However, I wish to make it clear now, when I am well, that this is not the case and I would like her to be kept informed and updated at all times".

Issues regarding confidentiality should be prominently recorded in the patient's notes to allow for continuity of care.

Some questions you may wish to consider asking are:

- ▶ What is the diagnosis or problem?
- ▶ Why has this happened to them?
- ▶ Will they recover?
- ▶ What is likely to happen in the future? Will it get better or worse?
- ▶ What assessments have already been done?
- ▶ What are the aims of the care and treatment?
- ▶ What happens if they refuse treatment?
- ▶ Have you asked them about how much information they are happy to share with me?
- ▶ Would you like to ask me for any other information about them or the family?
- ▶ Can I tell you things that will not be shared with the person or other members of staff?
- ▶ What can I do to help?

*"I was so frustrated because the mental health team wouldn't give me any information about my son due to confidentiality. When I gained confidence, and was aware of what and how to ask, it made all the difference."*

### **If you are struggling to cope**

If you are struggling to cope, please call and speak to one of the Carers Liaison Workers at The Carers Centre on **01896 752431**

Borderline is also a useful local helpline who offer out-of-hours emotional and listening support. They can be contacted on Freephone: **0800 027 4466**



# Borders Carers Centre (SCIO)

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