Carers (Scotland) Bill
Mental Health Carers Forum

The Mental Health Carer Forum is a collective platform for carers of someone with mental health problems and the people they care for, to have their voices heard within mental health services and beyond. The mandate for the Forum comes from carers of people with mental health problems via the organisations represented in the Forum, who provide support, advice, training and information to carers of someone with mental health problems, as well as seek the views of carers of someone with mental health problems on a variety of issues specific to the needs of carers of someone with mental health problems.

The aim of the Forum is to provide an influential, collective voice for carers of someone with mental health problems in Scotland, leading to improved experiences and enhanced recovery outcomes for people living with mental health problems and their carer.

The Mental Health Carers Forum have compiled the following response to the Scottish Government’s Carers Bill and would like to submit this on behalf of carers of someone with mental health problems.

Comments on Adult Carer Support Plan

The Forum agrees with the removal of the “regular and substantial” test so that all carers can access an Adult Carer Support Plan. Many carers of people with mental health problems felt that this testing was discriminatory towards them, as it can be difficult, due to the fluctuating nature of mental illness, to ‘fit into’ the criteria of ‘regular and substantial’, so this change is very much welcomed by carers of someone with mental health problems.

Similarly the removal of the requirement of the person being cared for must be in receipt of community care services is also welcomed by mental health carers. Again due to fluctuating nature of mental illness, and eligibility for community care services, many people with lived experience of mental health problems do not use community care services.

Many carers of people with mental health problems report that an issue for them is dealing with emergencies. Mental health problems can escalate into crisis or emergency situation very quickly. In order for carers of someone with mental health problems to feel able to cope with such times, emergency planning is crucial. This is an area which has not been covered in the Bill, but one which will be covered in regulations around the Bill. The Mental Health Forum feels that this is something which should be in place within the Bill itself. Emergency and anticipatory care planning is very important for mental health carers and it should always be a part of the Adult Carer Support Plan. This would also highlight services which may be needed to be put in place to support carers of someone with mental health problems at such times, such as mental health carer advocacy. Very often emergency care situations can
result in contact with mental health legislation (if someone becomes subject to compulsory short term detention in hospital for instance). This is a bewildering time for a lot of carers of people with mental health problems and a time when advocacy could prove vital.

**Provision of Advocacy for Cares of someone with Mental Health Problems**

The Mental Health Carers Forum is disappointed to note that specific mental health advocacy is not made part of the Carer Bill. It is only when mental health deteriorates to such an extent that a person requires care and treatment, that such medical treatment can be legally administered against her or his will, via Mental Health (Care & Treatment) (Scotland) Act 2003. As such it is vital that those who provide care to someone with lived experience of mental health problems should have support to help them plan for such instances, and deal with the necessary personnel and paperwork involved in such legal detentions. Whilst not every mental health carer will be involved in legal detention situations, we believe that they should have the option to put emergency arrangements in place via an Adult Carer Support Plan.

**Forensic Carer Issues**

Another area of great concern to the Mental Health Carer Forum is the lack of inclusion into the Carers Bill of the specific needs to support Forensic Carers. This can be a small number of carers, but they are a very under-represented group of carers and can be in some of the most complex of circumstances. Some forensic carers may have to deal with mental health legislation as well as other areas of legislation such as criminal justice processes. Having the needs of forensic carers acknowledged and included in the Carer Bill would go a long way to helping such carers to come forward and seek the help and support they may require.

One barrier to forensic carers seeking support is that, for some, they may not be seen as carrying out any carer role (as the person they care for is in hospital for lengthy times). However that does not stop a person being a carer, or having to deal with statutory and legal services. All carers are recognised as such with mental health legislation, and it would be good to see all carers equally recognised within Carer Bill. There is scope within the proposed content of the Adult Carer Support Plan to reflect the needs of specific groups of carers, for instance there may be a need to be able to come together with other forensic carers, but if you live miles away from nearest official group then transport could be an issue a carer would need help with.

**Eligibility Criteria – Call for National Criteria**

Lack of nationally set eligibility criteria for determining whether a carer is eligible for support is also something mental health carers have been disappointed in. Setting local eligibility criteria on paper may seem the reasonable way to go forward, but in times of budgetary cuts and local authority belt tightening, it is feared that this will become something of a post
code lottery. Carers of someone with mental health problems are especially concerned as they have already seen cuts to provision of services in the community for people with lived experience of mental health problems, which has resulted in more demands being made of carers, and so likelihood of carers’ health and wellbeing becoming affected by an increased caring role. In local authority areas already struggling with impact of financial cuts, the fear is that support specific to the needs of carers of people with mental health problems will not be seen as an important criteria for eligibility for support, and so some carers of people with mental health problems may in fact find they are not eligible for vital support, such as advocacy.

**Involvement of Carers of someone with Mental Health Problems**

Carers of someone with mental health problems are also very disappointed with lack of any duty to involve carers in hospital admissions and discharge processes. As with most carers, carers of people with mental health problems regularly report being left out of admission and discharge processes, but in the case of carers of people with mental health problems this can place them in challenging situations, particularly where there has been not involvement in discharge planning. *Triangle of Care: Involving Carers in Mental Health Services*, is one tool which promotes the carers as equal partners in care of person with lived experience of mental health. It is being actively used within some health board areas to improve carer involvement particularly around admission and discharge processes, as these health board areas have recognised the lack of such involvement. However this is not replicated throughout Scotland. It would therefore have been good to have seen some kind of statutory duty placed on health boards, and now integrated services, to include carers at admission and discharge times.

**Background to Mental Health Carers Forum**

This collective of organisations supporting and working with carers of people with mental health problems came about as a direct output of Mental Health Strategy Working Group for Commitment 2 “Involving Carers and Family Members”. The lead body for the establishment of the Forum is Carers Trust Scotland, who also provides Secretariat for the Forum. Chairing the Forum is carried out by Support in Mind Scotland.

**Objectives of Mental Health Carers Forum**

- Increase understanding of the expertise, knowledge and experience mental health carers can contribute to the care and treatment of person with mental health problems
- Influence mental health and carer policy and practices to reflect the distinct needs of mental health carers
• Increase recognition of the value placed on mental health carers by those being cared for, and the need for carers to be respected as equally important in decisions being made about a service user's life
• Improve communication between person with lived experience of mental health, mental health carers and professionals

Membership of Mental Health Carers Forum

• Support in Mind Scotland (Chair)
• Carers Trust Scotland (Secretariat)
• Voices of Experience (VoX)
• Edinburgh Carers Council
• User & Carer Involvement (UCI)
• Glasgow Association for Mental Health (GAMH)
• HUG, Action for Mental Health
• Scottish Independence Advocacy Alliance (SIAA)

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