

The Triangle of Care – Carers Included: A guide to best practice in Mental Health Care in England

Guidance for Limited Contact Services

Introduction

The Triangle of Care was developed to support mental health services and other secondary care services to ensure they are including and supporting carers appropriately. The programme supports hospitals, community services, rehabilitation services and residential services to better understand who carers are, what their role is, what support they need (and where to find it) and how to ensure they are appropriately included in service delivery.

Many providers deliver a vast array of services now that do not fit the model that Triangle of Care is based on and the self-assessment tool designed to help services identify how they include and support carers would present challenges to these services. Services like: Psychiatric Liaison, Prison Inreach and IAPT (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies) and learning disability day care services. This is an example list of limited contact services but is not a comprehensive list. These services provide vital care to those with a mental health problem or learning disability but may have limited contact with carers.

This guidance has been developed to support services who may have limited contact with carers but will enable them to begin to identify and support them and provide information and support in the limited time or access they have.

What is a Carer

A carer is anyone (of any age) 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. It's important to note that often a service user may be supported by a range of people, it's therefore important to identify those who are primary carers initially.

What is the Triangle of Care

The Triangle of Care works to ensure that services are able to recognise carers, identify them, include them in the service delivery and ensure they have access to support in their own right. Even for services that have limited contact with carers we recommend they read the full guide to understand what carers experience and need from professionals. In times of crisis, carers can feel incredibly isolated and need support in their own right to get through these difficult times. By identifying carers and ensuring they have access to support they are able to better help service users.

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The Triangle of Care is based on a set of six standards which are transferable to any setting, it is beneficial for professionals to consider how these standards would apply to their service.

Triangle of Care Six Standards:

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 regarding confidentiality and sharing information are in place.
4. Defined post(s) responsible for carers are in place.
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 is available.

Things to Consider for Limited Contact Services

Services that may have limited contact with carers may feel that they cannot implement the Triangle of Care, or that due to the nature of their service it isn't appropriate for them to engage with carers. However, for many carers these services may be the only ones they come into contact with, so the service is well placed to ensure that carers are being supported.

Limited contact services are often engaging with service users at a point of acute crisis, whether this be in an A&E department or in prison; it is likely that carers will be in need of crucial support and information.

If they are caring for someone with a long term condition then a referral to a carer support service is vital at this point.

It is worth noting that many carers wait a number of years before receiving a referral to appropriate support, therefore it is important that services do not assume that this referral has been made by another team or service.

Implementing the Triangle of Care in limited contact services, may appear at first to be difficult but this can be reduced down to a series of simple questions that a service can ask itself to ensure they are meeting carers needs. In addition there are a number of actions a service can take to improve how they identify, include and support carers.

What does your Service currently provide in relation to carers?

Below are a series of questions that your service should consider in relation to how you currently identify, inform and support carers.

- When you are meeting service users is anyone else with them?
- What do those people do for the service user, do you ask?

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- If a professional is handing over the care to another service do you make carers' situation/knowledge part of that process?
- Make clear what the next steps in the service user's care are and where that person is going and inform the carer of this.
- How are professionals helping carers understand the process and the system?
- Do you engage with carers and listen to what they have to say? Do you give them information on mental health or services for them (both of which you can do without the service user's consent or breaching confidentiality protocols)?
- Are you aware of what services are available for carers in your area?
- Do you give service users the opportunity or choice to have their carer present during an assessment (especially pertinent in A&E settings)?
- Do you routinely provide carers with information on how to access a carer's assessment? Do you understand the value of a carer's assessment and how to make a referral?
- Do you include carers in discharge planning and discuss the value of including them with service users?

Good Practice Example

Pennine Care NHS Foundation Trust – have a leaflet for carers explaining the process when a person presents at A&E with mental health problems.

What your Service can do to improve its Engagement with Carers

If you don't feel you can confidently answer these questions. There are a number of things you should consider:

1. Develop your assessment/admission process to include carers, many teams within your organisation will have already done this and you can use their examples to adapt to your service's needs.
2. As part of the assessment process, ensure there is provision to give and receive information from carers (even if the person assessed doesn't enter secondary care).
3. Ensure your team has accessed carer awareness training, this will enable you to understand who carers are and work in a more whole family & holistic way.
4. Does your team discuss with service users sharing confidential information, ensure there are clear and understandable procedures for your team to discuss confidentiality with service users.
5. Make sure your procedures give carers time to provide you with information and ensure you explain mental health and learning disability care pathways and the services provided.
6. Appoint a carer lead or champion for your team and service. This role can liaise with other carer champions across your organisation and support your team in the transition process to carer inclusion.
7. Explore developing a simple introduction to your service that can be given or sent to carers.

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8. Make time in your service model to speak to carers and ensure that there are meeting and greeting protocols in place.
9. Ensure you have information on what services are available locally to give to carers to ensure they are able to access support in their own right.
10. Carers you come into contact with are given information on how to access a carer's assessment as well as one-to-one support and advocacy.
11. Ensure that you and your team understand all carers (adult, parent, young and young adult) rights under the new Care Act. Also, ensure that you are able to provide carers with information on these rights.

It is recommended that a service use a simple RAG rating (similar to the full Triangle of Care self-assessment) to measure how they are improving against the list above.

Long Term Carer Inclusion

Implementing and adapting your service to meet the standards of the Triangle of Care does not happen overnight. Implementing the Triangle of Care is fundamentally about adapting the culture of a team, service and organisation.

Services need to review their existing practice and models to ascertain what they do currently, how they can be more consistent, how they can make their services more inclusive to carers and continue to reflect through their journey to ensure they continue to move towards a carer inclusive model.

Information and Resources

You can find more information about the Triangle of Care and other resources to help professionals support carers at Carers Trust's Professionals website here:

www.professionals.carers.org