A review of Support Services for Mental Health Carers in Oxfordshire

What is a Mental Health Carer?
A Carer is someone of any age who provides regular unpaid support to a partner, family or friend who could not manage without this help. A Mental Health Carer may be caring for someone that is only affected by mental health problems, or for someone who has a combination of mental and physical health problems. This review focuses specifically on Mental Health Carers.

What are support services for Mental Health Carers?
The levels of support services available to Carers of those people with mental health problems can vary widely according to need. However they can include things such as:
- Individual support to Carers and via Carer support groups
- Respite breaks
- Practical help obtaining Carer’s assessments and care plans
- Training and education sessions
- Help for Carers to communicate their needs and views to health and social care staff

How many Carers are there?
In Oxfordshire it is estimated that there are approximately 67,000 Carers looking after or giving special help to a sick, disabled or elderly person. Of these:
- 11% = 7,370 are looking after someone only affected mentally
- 22% = 14,740 are looking after someone affected both physically and mentally

Why are we reviewing these services?
- Currently Rethink (http://bit.ly/Rethink-oxon) is the contracted provider of the Mental Health Carers Support Service in Oxfordshire. This contract comes to end in July 2011.
- NHS Oxfordshire and Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) have recently redesigned and bought new day time services for people with mental health problems under the Keeping People Well (http://bit.ly/KPWell) programme.
- The Carers Oxfordshire (http://bit.ly/Carer-oxon) service provided by OCC in partnership with Age UK Oxfordshire was launched on 1st April for all adult Carers in the county.

This review needs to ensure that the service model delivered in the future is relevant for Carers today. We need to consider the current needs of Mental Health Carers in the context of the services already provided through general Carers Support Services and the new services under the Keeping People Well programme. This will ensure that we prevent duplication and make best use of the available resources to meet the needs of as many Mental Health Carers as possible.

The local context
The aim of the programme for ‘Better Mental Health for Oxfordshire’ is to provide settings in which:
- People can stay well
- When people become unwell they will get better, quicker
- Services will deliver effective, timely and appropriate interventions

1 Based on data from National Information Centre - Survey of Carers in Households - 2009/10 England, Dec 2010
There are two major shifts set out in the programme for ‘Better Mental Health for Oxfordshire’

a) A move to buying services that provide better health outcomes for the people of Oxfordshire.

b) A move to personalised services that are offering people the opportunity to plan and purchase their own care or support rather than have it provided for them.

Therefore this review will look at what the support services for Mental Health Carers should look like to deliver these intended outcomes.

The diagram below illustrates the intensity of needs of Mental Health Carers and the type of support services that could help.

What has happened so far

A project group has been set up to review the specific needs of Mental Health Carers. This group includes: Mental Health Carers, people from the current support services, staff from Oxfordshire County Council, Oxford Health Foundation Trust (OHFT), as well as finance and contract staff from NHS Oxfordshire.

What happens now – let us know your views

A consultation on Mental Health Carers Support Services takes place from 9 May 2011 until 20 June 2011. The responses to the consultation will help to inform and shape the support services that are bought for Mental Health Carers and the health outcomes identified.

Contact us with your views – Which support services do you think Mental Health Carers use and find most useful? Are there any services missing? Do Mental Health Carers need specific support services specifically tailored to their needs?

You can also write to us FREE with your views at:
Mental Health Carers’ Consultation
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