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Tyne and Wear
NHS Foundation Trust

Patient and Carer Engagement Team

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A national Triangle of Care steering group, chaired by Carers Trust, aims to ensure the project represents those working to improve carer support in mental health services and to drive forward good practice across England.

To find out more, tel: 0844 800 4361, email: info@carers.org or visit <http://professionals.carers.org>.

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The Triangle of Care: Carers Included



A Guide to Best Practice in Mental Health Care

An introduction for professionals

“The Triangle of Care really promotes inclusivity for all involved – and this is the key to effective outcomes for both carers and service users.”

Mental health professional



What is The Triangle of Care?

The Triangle of Care is a therapeutic alliance between carers, service users and professionals. It aims to promote safety and recovery and to sustain wellbeing in mental health by including and supporting carers.

The Triangle of Care is based on six principles that mental health trusts can use to include and support carers:

- 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 acute care pathway.
- 6** A range of carer support services is available along with a self-assessment tool.

These principles can underpin a healthy and productive relationship between the carer, service user and professional.

How The Triangle of Care can help carers

Carers are often the only constant in the service user's mental health care journey. They are there when crisis occurs, when the person is well and when that person needs support with day-to-day activities. They often understand the service user's needs and condition extremely well and as such are a vital partner in care.

If professionals can recognise the support that carers give service users and acknowledge them as a key partner in care then service users will receive better care and support on their journey to recovery.

Carers often do not recognise themselves as a carer and as time goes on many can feel stressed and pressured but may be reluctant to seek help. If a carer has received early information and support they are more likely to have a healthy relationship with the person they are caring for and also retain their own independence and interests.

If staff are not carer aware then carers can easily be forgotten and lost in the system. If staff engage with carers they can become a strong ally in the therapeutic process.

If staff understand and are confident about the principles of confidentiality they are able to share appropriate information with carers.

A carers lead on a ward or team can ensure information for carers is available and promote an environment that is sensitive to carers' needs.

Giving carers appropriate information means they are less likely to ask staff questions. Information about support services can also help them with their own mental and physical health, enabling them to continue their caring role in a more informed and positive way.

How The Triangle of Care can help professionals

The Triangle of Care delivers many benefits for professionals, including:

- Creating a more helpful, supportive relationship with carers.
- Giving carers and service users realistic expectations.
- Ensuring staff have information about service users' moods, behaviours and the best way to interact with them.
- Getting more support from carers on the ward.
- Partnership working – if the service user exhibits challenging behaviour, the carer may be able to influence their behaviour.
- Reduced admissions – a carer can often recognise the signs that a service user is becoming unwell. By listening to carers, steps can be taken to help reduce the need for a service user to be admitted.