

# HOW DO I HELP A COLLEAGUE, CLIENT, FRIEND OR RELATIVE WHO IS A CARER?

## 1 Who are carers?

A carer is:

- A person of any age, who looks after family, partners or friends in need of Help because they are ill, frail or have a disability and need support to live independently
- Someone who provides unpaid care
- May be short-term or long-term

Carers can be

- Adults supporting adults
- Young people caring for adults or another young person
- People looking after children with disabilities, whether the carer is a parent or not

## 2 What do they do?

- Moving and handling
- Help with feeding
- Personal hygiene
- Administering medication
- Emotional support
- Assistance with life skills
- Acting as an advocate or guardian for the cared for person
- Helping someone access leisure & recreation

## 3 Defined in legislation as

People providing a substantial amount of care on a regular basis – words *regular and substantial* designed to ensure that they may have access to a 'carer's assessment' as a gateway to securing practical support from the statutory agencies. . . . wording deliberately vague.

## 4 How many carers are there?

- Midlothian has a population of almost 90,000 (latest census figures), with 8,187 people providing unpaid care – i.e. 10%
- Edinburgh region – 38, 876 people considered themselves to be unpaid carers – real figure probably much higher
- Scottish Exec funded *Rural Voices Initiative* to assess number of carers in Wigtownshire (Stranraer) when it comes to caring for people with drug misuse. Family Support Group did the work. Scottish Exec officials came up with 9; but Support Group identified over 900! A lot happens we don't know about.

## 5 36 Hour Day

- Quote from Mace & Rabins (p 99 in 'In a Strange Land')
- Different perspective given by Ford (p118 in 'In a Strange Land')
- . . . . and Margaret Jeremiah (p119)

## 6 How are family carers affected?

- Have much less time for themselves & other family members
- Usually adverse financial implications (may have to give up work or promotion, or incur extra expenditure)
- Undergo considerable stress – more likely to take prescribed medication; visit their GPs 50% more often and report higher levels of stress and physical sickness
- If not already in good health, condition may deteriorate

- At some stage (and for long periods) likely to suffer from chronic fatigue – brought on by lack of sleep & reduced opportunities for relaxation. Significant association of depression and anxiety
- May well experience feelings of anger, guilt, shame and despair – or overwhelming sadness. May feel misunderstood and undervalued and appreciated
- Their own quality of life deteriorates markedly
- Often increase in family conflict
- Can lose contact with friends and colleagues – feel themselves to be trapped and increasingly isolated
- Can feel increasingly de-skilled and mystified by rules and regulations (eg tax credit system) – particularly true in mental health areas
- One carer has written: “As he entered the last two horrifying months of his life I could barely sustain my inner strength. I felt that emotionally I was unravelling and disintegrating. I was conscious of a void filled only with pain and terror. I entered an alien and foreign place.”

## 7 How do I help?

### a) personally

- Be there for them – don’t avoid them
- Be willing to be inadequate/vulnerable – we all are anyway
- Be understanding of their situation
- Ask after them (if appropriate) – remember to ask after person being cared for **and** the person providing care
- Recognise the pressures that they are under (and their tiredness)
- Is there any physical help you can give? Lift? Shopping? Searching out advice? Sitting in and giving them a break? Inviting them out?
- Don’t take umbrage if they are curt or seem to be not interested.

### b) at work

- Employment Relations Act introduced some benefits for carers including a right to time off for emergencies.
- Carers have the right to take a ‘reasonable’ amount of time off work to deal with an emergency involving a dependent. This right also includes some protection from victimisation or dismissal if you take time off. *It is at the employer’s discretion whether or not leave is paid or unpaid*
- Situations where time might be taken off include
  - A disruption or breakdown in care arrangements
  - If the dependent is ill, has been assaulted or been in an accident
  - An incident involving a child during school hours
  - Making longer term arrangements for a dependent who is ill or injured
  - Dealing with the needs of a dependent
  - Parental leave – more if the child is disabled
  - Flexible working – parents of a disabled child under 18 who have been in employment longer than 26 weeks have the right to request flexible working such as working from home or changing hours – must apply in writing. Govt is at present considering new legislation to extend this right to carers of adults.
  - NB – check whether this legislation applies to Scotland, I think it does.
- Understanding – especially of the *effects* of caring
- Be aware of specialised help and display their literature. For example: VOCAL has personnel specialising in carers and employment. Jane Greenacre 0131 622 6666 or jane@vocal.carers.net. Address is 8-13 Johnston Terrace, Edinburgh, EH1 2PW <http://www.vocal.org.uk/>.