

REPORT FROM ANNUAL CARER CONFERENCE
CARERS' HEALTH MATTERS



Hilton Strathclyde Hotel, Bellshill

3rd November 2014

North Lanarkshire Carers Together annual conference took place in the Hilton Strathclyde Hotel on 3rd November 2014. The theme of this year's conference was 'Carers Health Matters' and the aim of the conference was to highlight the findings of the Carers Health Needs Report (1st April 2013 – 31st March 2014). This report was the culmination of an extensive carer survey that was undertaken by Yvonne Cameron and Corinne Thomson (both Co-ordinators for Carers with North Lanarkshire Carers Together) and took place over the course of 2013/14 where they met with many "hidden" carers, of whom 455 participated anonymously in the survey. Key findings of the report highlighted that:

- **Anxiety and stress** was the highest ranked health problem (**74%** of all carers who took part in the survey).
- **Lack of sleep** was the second highest ranked health problem (**45%** of all carers who took part in the survey).
- **Back pain** was the third highest ranked health problem in (**44%** of all carers who took part in the survey).
- **Depression or feeling sad** was the fourth highest ranked health problem (**42%** of all carers who took part in the survey).
- **Arthritis** was the fifth highest ranked health problem (**32%** of all carers who took part in the survey).
- **Isolation and feeling alone** was the sixth highest ranked health problem (**27%** of all carers who took part in the survey).

The Scottish Government has stated that the major health concerns of carers are related to stress, anxiety, emotional health and wellbeing along with the physical strains of caring, especially back problems through lifting and handling. Early identification and support of carers has a positive impact on their overall health.

A copy of the Carers Health Needs Report was shared with all GP practices in North Lanarkshire as well as North Lanarkshire Council, NHS Lanarkshire, Scottish Government and National Carer Organisations. A full copy of the report can be obtained by contacting admin@carerstogether.org

Duncan Mackay, Executive Director of Housing and Social Work Services, North Lanarkshire Council provided an informative update around the move to the Integration of Health and Social Work for adults and delivered an easy to understand presentation that was built around the following key statements.

- Stop me going in (which referred to acute or care home setting)
- If I'm in make it timely and safe
- Have the best people look after me
- Don't let me get stuck
- Let me die with dignity
- Use all your resources wisely



*Duncan Mackay
North Lanarkshire Council*

Duncan also highlighted some of challenges that we all face in terms of moving towards Integration which included:

- Politics
- Cultures
- Control
- Prevention vs. Treatment
- Shared Intelligence
- Targets

This presentation was concluded with Duncan highlighting some of the opportunities that Integration brings which included carer representation on the Joint Integration Board and the importance of the continued partnership working between the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors in order to provide the best possible outcomes for people who use services and their carers.

Corinne Thomson, Co-ordinator for Carers spoke about the work of the NHS Carer Support Team which has Co-ordinators in both acute and primary care settings. Corinne's presentation focused specifically on the primary care work in relation to identifying, signposting and supporting carers through the GP practices in North Lanarkshire

'Caring Together' – The Carers Strategy for Scotland, sets out the issues around the emotional impact of caring and the physical demands, both of which can impact adversely on carers' health. Carers, like anyone else, can experience poor health unconnected with caring however, the strategy states that carers' health can be protected if a range of support is delivered according to individual needs.



Corinne spoke about the range of services provided by the Co-ordinators for Carers within GP practices which includes carer information boards, carer information packs, promotion of the carers' register and associated benefits, carer awareness training with GP's and primary care staff and carer open days which enable carers to talk about concerns or issues they may have and seek appropriate services or supports. Corinne concluded by providing some statistics that highlight the effectiveness of the 2 Co-ordinator for Carers posts within North Lanarkshire and the partnership approach to supporting carers. The statistics are for the period 1 April 2013 to 31st March 2014:

Corinne Thomson, NLCT

- 221 new carers were identified and became members of NLCT
- 98 referrals to social work
- 95 referrals to Princess Royal Trust, Lanarkshire Carers Centre
- 22 referrals to Carers Liaison and Support Project

- 65 referrals to the Financial Inclusion Team for benefit checks
- 301 referrals to community and third sector support i.e. befriending, dementia supports, community transport, handy person etc.

Kate Carol, Carer gave a moving presentation about her life as a carer for her son and spoke of the challenges she has faced over the years and how isolated and ‘hidden’ she had become until she was identified by the Co-ordinators for Carers in her local Medical Centre (Orchard Medical Centre). Kate told us about how she initially did not see herself as a carer but after speaking to Corinne and Yvonne (Co-ordinators for Carers), she realised how much she was trying to cope with and that she was, in fact, at crisis point.

Kate concluded by telling us how much her quality of life has improved since receiving support which included assistance from the Mental Health Co-ordinator for Carers. These supports have enabled Kate to undertake a local college course, volunteer her time within the community and take pride in her achievements, which has improved her own mental health, confidence and self-esteem. As well as this, Kate now feels that her relationship with her son has improved which is a positive outcome for both.



Kate Carol, Carer

Fiona Collie, Policy & Public Affairs Manager of Carers Scotland spoke about the financial impact on caring as highlighted in their Caring and Family Finances Report which detailed findings from a year-long inquiry with carers. The report provided concerning statistics which included:

- 46% had given up work to care and 10% had retired early
- 38% of carers were cutting back on essentials such as food and heating to make ends meet.
- 1 in 5 were unable to afford rent or mortgage
- Almost 40% could not afford utility bills
- 1 in 10 have used all their savings to pay basic bills
- 42% are using overdrafts or credit cards to make ends meet
- 44% are in debt
- 1 in 7 are in debt of £10,000 or more



Fiona Collie, Carers Scotland

Fiona highlighted that 53% of the carers who took part in the inquiry said that money worries were taking a toll on their health with one carer commenting:

“Caring takes so much time. I care, work and sleep. I suffer stress, depression, high blood pressure and back problems. I have virtually no family or social life.”

Fiona concluded by providing some consistent themes in relation to the financial impact of caring:

- Carer household incomes are simply not sufficient to meet the costs of caring and disability
- Carers are using up savings, are in debt and cutting back on essentials to make ends meet. This is having an impact on health and wellbeing.
- There is wide spread anxiety about the future, in particular the introduction of Personal Independent Payments.
- Carers Allowance is too low and with criteria that makes carers ineligible
- Carers feel “degraded” or “insulted” by media reporting and Government narrative around dependency and fraud.

Dr Carolyn Calder, GP Orchard Medical Centre gave an informative and interesting presentation about how their practice works in partnership with North Lanarkshire Carers Together to meet the needs of carers. This included an overview of GP enhanced services for carers which aims to support carers in their caring role, improve flexibility within the practice and improve information available to GP practices and carers. Dr Calder described how this is put into practice which included:

- Lead GP for carers (Dr Calder).
- Carer Liaison Officer (Jane Riley, Practice Manager).
- Carer Notice Board and Carer Information Table.
- Active promotion of GP Carers Register which prompts an electronic ‘pop-up’ on carer’s file.
- Promotion of Carer Emergency Cards.
- Active referrals to North Lanarkshire Carers Together and Princess Royal Trust Lanarkshire Carers Centre.
- Carers invited for Annual Health Checks and Carer Flu Clinic in partnership with North Lanarkshire Carers Together.

Dr Calder also spoke about the carer awareness and protected learning sessions delivered by the Co-ordinators for Carers and how this has resulted in “carer champions” within the practice which has resulted in a significant increase in the identification of “hidden” carers. Orchard Medical Practice has also been pro-active in carer open days and gave the example of a well-attended event during Carers Week 2014 where carers were able to access a range of information and support services as well as enjoying some relaxation therapies and informal chats about their caring role and general health and wellbeing.



Dr Carolyn Calder, GP

Dr Calder concluded by welcoming the Carers Health Needs Report produced by North Lanarkshire Carers Together and discussed some of the supports, services and treatments that could assist with the conditions highlighted in the key findings.

Lesley Fishleigh, Carer Resource Worker with the Princess Royal Trust, Lanarkshire Carers Centre provided a detailed presentation around two aspects of the carer support service which included the benefits that carers can expect from the 'Carers Registration Card' and the new 'Short Breaks Information Service'



Carers living in North Lanarkshire can access a range of benefits to promote positive wellbeing via the carers' registration card. Lesley talked about the advantages which include discounted or free access to leisure opportunities and special 'carer' rates for services such as foot clinics, handyman services, power of attorney and wills. Lesley also informed delegates about the 'Respite Service' which is a joint partnership with Shared Care Scotland and supports carers to access quality time out from their caring role.

Lesley Fishleigh, PRTLCC

The Short Break Carers Information Service and Creative Breaks opportunity was the final part of Lesley's presentation which highlighted the importance of short breaks for carers:

"Access to personalised, flexible short breaks provision is crucial. Short breaks help to recharge batteries and sustain carers in their caring role. They can be a lifesaver for some. Carers can have a life of their own through the provision of suitable short breaks".

The Short Break Carers Information Service and associated Short Breaks Strategy is a result of partnership working led by the North Lanarkshire Carers Strategy Implementation Group and it was most encouraging to hear how this new, much needed service for carers and professionals is progressing. Lesley also provided information on the Creative Breaks opportunities and encouraged carers to contact the carers centre or access their web site to find out further information.

Facilitated, table-top discussions provided all delegates with the opportunity to discuss the topics presented with a particular focus on carer experiences within GP Practices. Comments are noted below:

- Orchard Medical Practice' approach is really good. Having a separate identified carers' champion and liaison person is beneficial. GP practices need to promote this person more clearly.
- This conference has highlighted a need for the example of good practice shown by Orchard Medical Practice to be replicated throughout North Lanarkshire. Some carers

are experiencing working between two different practices i.e. their own and the practice of the person they care for and can see clear inconsistencies in the approach to supporting carers.

- Carers not sure of the benefits of the GP carers register other than those being provided by North Lanarkshire Carers Together.
- Carer notice boards promote the North Lanarkshire Carers Together staff – this should also have a picture and contact details of liaison person or champion within GP practice as carer issues are sometimes directly related to primary care service.
- Pop up identification is excellent – carers have expressed that despite registering with their GP they do not feel they are identified as carers and strongly suspect there is no pop up alert in place. This should be made mandatory for ALL practices.
- Carers have stated that they have had an excellent service from North Lanarkshire Carers Together staff and have registered with their GP, however they have never been contacted by their practice to attend a carer information day or a flu clinic as described by Orchard Medical Practice
- Carer notice boards have helped to set the carer scene in health centres and GP practices – carers reported that boards are most helpful and carers have commented that the partnership with NLCT has provided excellent carer outcomes.
- Communication within GP practices seems to be an issue between primary and acute, primary and social work and within departments in health centres. Carers felt that their practice would be reluctant to implement pop up alert system.
- NHS Lanarkshire should consider working with North Lanarkshire Carers Together to have a media campaign about the importance of carers having the flu jab. Some carers get invited others know nothing about it even though they are on GP register. Carers felt let down after presentation as they have not experienced this service.
- A case study should be done around the way Orchard Medical Practice work in partnership with North Lanarkshire Carers Together – and it should be shared in GP forums and practice managers’ meetings as an area of good practice. This should also be publicised in the Pulse magazine.
- The information provided in GP practices by North Lanarkshire Carers Together is invaluable – all carers at table spoke of this being well positioned and always updated.
- Carers recognised the benefits of being able to quickly access North Lanarkshire Carers Together staff for face to face meetings, this was highly valued.

- Not all carers could access carer services being offered in GP practices during the day – should consider some evening sessions.
- Carer information should be on TV screens in health centres and GP practices. This could include a carer telling their story and highlighting how they can access support in their practice. This should be simple to do and would make a huge difference.
- Carers noted that stating they are on GP register has enabled them to get an appointment at short notice.
- Some changes within GP practices are not carer friendly, for example carers spoke of a move to telephone consultations and requests for appointments to be made over the phone and not in person. This could potentially mean that other underlying issues for carers i.e. stress and depression may not be picked up. These kinds of changes should be considered in consultation with carers and North Lanarkshire Carers Together.
- Carers stated that they would like a designated carer contact number within the GP practice – which should link to carer champion or carer liaison person this will ensure good communication with staff and North Lanarkshire Carers Together.

Melanie Menzies, Health & Wellbeing Manager NL Leisure, rounded up our conference by providing a fun and invigorating exercise session which was enjoyed by all. Melanie also provided information on health and wellbeing opportunities available via NL Leisure.



“Hands up all those having fun”

Conference Evaluation

111 delegates completed an evaluation form. Feedback was very positive and encouraging with a significant majority of delegates rating very highly the overall format of the conference, the contribution and performance of individual speakers and the value of the round table discussion time.

Prepared by A. Smith