



Consultation on the refocusing of the Carer's Strategy for Wales

Response from the College of Occupational Therapists

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The College of Occupational Therapists (COT) is pleased to provide a response to this Welsh Assembly Government document.
- 1.2. The COT represents over 29,000 occupational therapists who are either working or studying across the United Kingdom, of which over 15 are either working or studying in Wales. The College also supports a number of support workers who are known as associate members. Occupational therapists (OTs) work in the NHS, Local Authority Social Services and Housing Departments, schools, primary care settings, and a wide range of vocational and employment rehabilitation services.
- 1.3. Occupational Therapists are regulated by the Health Professions Council, and work with individuals of all ages with a wide range of occupational problems resulting from physical, mental, social or developmental difficulties. The philosophy of occupational therapy is founded on the concept of occupation as a crucial element of health and wellbeing. Practice is based on holistic, person centred care.

2. General Comments

- 2.1. The College welcomes the Assembly Government's recognition of the need to refocus the carer's strategy and ensure it remains up to date. Significant progress has been made to date.
- 2.2. However, it is disappointing that the consultation document does little to further enshrine carer's needs into a framework of good practice from statutory health and social services. An opportunity is also missed to press for greater support and flexibility in employment.
- 2.3. Occupational therapists work to ensure that all people are able to carry out the occupations that are important to their own wellbeing and life. In this role we are aware that carers lives are often severely limited by the pressures that caring presents. Many carers willingly accept these limitations for a range of reasons. A citizen centred society needs to ensure that the aims and values are delivered as practical service improvements.



3. Specific Comments

3.1. Q: Are the areas covered by the draft re-focused Wales Carers' Strategy comprehensive and pertinent? Are any critical issues not covered?

The financial impact of caring and ability to remain in work or continue social activities are a real problem. Financial pressure and loss of these opportunities impacts on carers' health and wellbeing, as well as their long-term capacity to care. "Fulfilled lives, supportive communities," acknowledges statutory health and social care services' huge reliance on carers. This strategy needs to promote a vision of how that reliance is to be made sustainable. Practical support to ensure carers are nurtured and supported are needed to ensure carers can continue as long as possible. This will require investment in extra services and will require a culture of good practice that fosters a view of assessments on a whole system rather than just on the service user's needs.

The key action on promoting awareness of and access to carer assessment and services needs to be strengthened.

Greater work will need to be done in future in enhancing the support available to employees with caring responsibilities. Often employers tolerate short-term pressures but it is the long-term acceptance of ongoing demands for flexibility that can mean a person is eventually forced out of employment.

3.2. Should any part of the draft document be changed? And if so how?

The document reads as an historical review of what has been achieved so far rather than a refocusing on future action. The key actions need to be more prominent and need to be supported by timescales and outcomes. Too many are for the Welsh Assembly Government when what is needed is a change in service delivery. This requires actions and outcomes by service deliverers rather than government.

3.3. Are the Key Actions proposed appropriate and relevant? Are there other Key Actions that could be included

See comment above. In addition the key actions need to relate to the objectives of the strategy and will need financial backing to ensure delivery.

4. Conclusion

4.1. The College welcomes the Welsh Assembly Government's commitment to support carers. However, we feel the document is more a position statement than a strategy. Occupational therapists wish to see a change in service delivery such that there is adequate support for carers in their important role of enabling the people they care for to live independent and fulfilled lives.

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