

Carers Protocol

1. Introduction

The following protocol sets out a simple, straight forward way which GPs, Health Care and other Practice staff at Teams Medical Practice can identify and refer carers for support through a carers' Single Point of Contact (SPOC). This is a confidential signposting service for all GP Practices in Gateshead. By referring unpaid carers to the SPOC, the Practice will identify carers that it comes into contact with and continue to update its records. The SPOC will also enable the Practice to signpost carers to vital support that they need e.g. information, advice, one-to-one support, carers groups, advocacy, short breaks, appropriate assessments etc.

2. Who is a Carer?

A carer is someone of any age, gender, sexual orientation, culture or background who provides unpaid support to relatives or friends, who could not manage without this help due to illness, disability, mental ill-health or a substance misuse problem. Parents are included if their child has a disability or chronic illness that has substantial effect on day-to-day life.

3. Objectives

The primary objective of this Protocol is to ensure that all patients in Gateshead with a caring role are identified, registered and signposted for support as early as possible through their GP Practice. The SPOC for all carers in Gateshead is 'Gateshead Carers Association' (GCA), where carers will be signposted to the most appropriate carer support organisation. The SPOC will only refer carers to agencies that have either completed a Charitable Quality Assessment Framework or are funded wholly or partially from Clinical Commissioning Group funding, Gateshead Council Commissioned finance and can demonstrate that they conform to a minimum standard of practice and care to maintain their funding arrangements. The Practice will seek to support carers by:

- Referring carers to the SPOC at 'Gateshead Carers' Association', who will then put the carer in touch with all appropriate sources of help and support that they require for their particular circumstance/s.
- Nominating a carers' champion, who will co-ordinate activities in relation to carer recognition and support.
- Providing direct support to carers by showing understanding of their role and offering some flexibility with appointments.
- Agreeing to sign-up for a special Carer Awareness Session, this will be co-ordinated by Gateshead Carers' Association.
- Keeping all carers under review to ensure that they are offered regular depression screening; influenza vaccine and other health checks that they require to optimise their own health and well-being
- Maintaining a carers' register to monitor carer numbers and explore ways that the practice might identify more carers.
- Audit the Practice's activity to support carers, for example, by the use of the Self-Assessment Checklist produced by the RCGP and Carers' Trust.
- Involving carers by seeking their views about how the practice is currently supporting carers and how it might improve support in the future.

4. Referring to the Carers' SPOC

Identifying and referring carers is everyone's business and a shared responsibility for GPs, Healthcare and all Practice staff. As many carers do not consider themselves carers, all surgery staff will proactively do the following:

- Direct approach: Routinely, asking patients if they are carers and then refer them to the SPOC at the earliest opportunity for further support if required.
- Self-identification: Patients that are carers being encouraged to notify the Practice about their caring role and those who have carers enabled to tell the Practice who their carers are.

More good opportunities for carer-identification that could be considered:

- Notice boards: Where possible, Practices should have a dedicated notice board for carers, which has details of the Carers' Single Point of Contact and/or actively display a poster asking patients to let the Practice know if they have a caring role; or to tell the Practice who their carer is. The Practice should also display a poster (See Appendix 3) on existing notice boards, with information that encourages carers to come forward. During seasonal events e.g. Flu clinics or 'National Carers' Week' any notice board dedicated to carer information will be made more prominent at the Practice.
- Referral Forms: SPOC Referral forms (see Appendix 1), made readily available at reception; so that carers can pick them up, complete and hand in at the reception desk.
- Digital Display/LED Screens: Digital displays in the Practice's waiting areas showing information or slides requesting patients that are carers to let the Practice know. Information shown on the display screens should also give a higher profile to carers during seasonal events such as 'Flu Vaccination Clinics' or National Carers' Week.
- Providing accessible documents: The Practice ensuring that any forms or documents used for carer identification are accessible. When requested, referral forms should be provided in an alternative format, which is easy for the carer to read, understand and complete.
- Printing out or collecting prescriptions: A tag line being included on the bottom of repeat prescriptions asking patients the following: 'Inform your GP or any Practice Staff if you are carer'. Reception staff could also endeavor when possible and appropriate to ask anyone collecting a prescription on behalf of another patient, if they have a caring role. They could also be informed about the benefits of accessing support and whether they would like to be referred to the SPOC.
- New patient registration forms: The Practice's 'New Patient Registration Form' should ask questions namely:
 - Do you look after someone?
 - Does someone look after you?
 - Do you require any support with your caring role?
 - Would you like to find out more information about appropriate support agencies in your area?
- Patients likely to need care: The Practice enclosing a copy of a standard letter to carers and referral form, when contacting patients, who are likely to require informal care. Examples of patients in this group would include those invited to attend:
 - Free influenza vaccination

- Periodic review of a potentially debilitating condition.
- Mailing: When possible a carer identification form could be included in mailings to patients.
- Alertness about carer issues: All health professionals in the Practice being alert to any direct or indirect indication that a patient might be a carer or have an unpaid carer. Once identified, the patient should be provided with the appropriate referral form and any other relevant information and directed to the SPOC.
- Supporting carers with form completion: All Health Professionals in the surgery being able to complete or issue self-referral forms, where they have ascertained that a patient is a carer. The carer should then be informed that referral to SPOC means further support, services, signposting or assistance for the caring role, where necessary. Practices will aim to discuss the benefits of carer-identification and referral to the SPOC three times a year as part of the regular discussion at multi-disciplinary team meetings to explore carers' personal knowledge.

5. Logistics Arrangements

To ensure an early referral to the SPOC, all forms received will be processed as soon as they arrive at the GP's reception desk. Where a box has been provided for patients, staff or health professionals to leave completed referral forms, it will be routinely emptied on a daily basis and processed as follows:

Where the patient is registered with the Practice:

- The Practice will record the carer's details and contact details on the patient records with the patient and carers' consent.

Where a carer is registered with the Practice:

- The Practice will record the carer's status on the carer's own record with carer's consent; thereby adding the carer to the Practice Carers' Register.
- Tag with 'Read Codes': Carers notes will then be tagged with relevant Read Codes.

A list of Standard 'Read Codes' are as follows:

918G	Carer
918f	Is no longer a carer
918F	Has a carer
ZV604	No able carer in the household
ZV608	Carer unable to cope

Once the details from the form have been entered on to the patient's notes, the referral forms will be faxed to the carers' SPOC using the following contact details and heading:

'SPOC' Referral Team
 Gateshead Carers' Association
 11 Regent Terrace
 Gateshead
 Tyne & Wear
 NE8 1LU

Fax No: (0191) 4900 128

Carers Champion

The main role of the Carers Champion is to:

- To champion carers' issues in the practice; and
- To encourage carers to register on their practice's Carers' Register.

The Carers Champion in the practice is Maureen.