

## Hospital Maidstone

## November 2024

*Hello and welcome to our Autumn edition of our Carer Support Newsletter*

As we embrace the changes of autumn, it's an ideal moment to reflect on the importance of looking after yourself as a family member, friend or a carer. The transition of seasons reminds us that change not only can cause anxiety about the unknown it can also bring new energy and opportunities. Look out for them!

Your wellbeing is just as vital as the care you provide for your loved one, and it's essential that you take time to recharge and seek support when needed. It's also a time to ensure that Carers' Rights are recognised and appreciated.

I hope you enjoy reading our newsletter we put together especially under the focus of **Carers Rights Day**.

Stay positive and remember that your efforts are not only seen but deeply appreciated. And don't forget — we are here for your support, please do get in touch. We would love to hear your feedback and/or ideas for future content.

*Jutta Neumann and the Carer Support Team*

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This year, **Carers Rights Day** is on **Thursday 21 November 2024**.

Carers Rights Day in the UK is an annual event aimed at raising awareness of the rights of unpaid carers and the support available to them. It is organized by Carers UK, a charity dedicated to supporting unpaid carers.

Each year has a specific theme, and various organizations and local communities participate by hosting events, distributing materials, and offering workshops to educate and support carers.

And this year's theme is **"Recognising your rights"**.

### Do you know your rights?

**1. Assessment:** Carers have the right to request a Carer's Assessment from their local authority, which **evaluates** their **needs** and the **support** they require.

**2. Support Services:** After an assessment, carers may be eligible for services such as **respite care**, **training**, or **financial support**. In the UK, carers have several important rights aimed at supporting their well-being and responsibilities.

Access to **emotional support** through counseling services or peer support groups is often available.

**3. Employment Rights:** The Carer's Leave Act has opened many more possibilities for carers who are employed. These changes came into effect on the 6 April 2024. Carers have protections under employment law, including the right to **request flexible working arrangements**.

**Time Off:** Under certain circumstances, employees have the right to take time off to care for someone who is ill or disabled.

**Protection from Discrimination:** Employers cannot discriminate against employees because of their caring responsibilities.

**4. Financial Support:** Carers have the right to access information about available support services, financial help, and local resources.

**Carer's Allowance:** Eligible carers may receive Carer's Allowance, a financial benefit to help with the costs of caring.

**5. Access to Information and Services:** Information Rights: Carers have the right to receive **information** about available **support** and **services** from their local authority and other organizations.

**Involvement in Care Planning:** Carers should be included in discussions about the care of the person they are supporting, ensuring their views and needs are considered.

**6. Non-Discrimination: Equality Act 2010:** Carers are protected under this act, which prevents discrimination based on caregiving status in various settings, including employment and access to services.

**7. Health and Well-being:** Right to Prioritize Health: Carers have the right to **prioritize** their **own health** and **well-being** and seek support to manage their physical and mental health.

The right to **register** with your **GP Practice** as an unpaid carer to enable you to access health checks and vaccinations (Free Flu vaccine)



## Voices from our hospital...

**Carers** have a massive **impact** on the care which we provide our patients, they are able to share information with us which the patient is unable to tell us and this can contribute positively towards their recovery. They advocate and will see the care from a different perspective and once again this can only contribute positively towards the patients recovery. It is really important to gather carers views as they are trusting Cygnet Maidstone with their loved one and they are able to provide us so much beneficial information. In addition it is also really important to gather the carers involvement as they have the **right to be involved** as we are caring for their loved one.

**Tina Stevens**  
Quality and Safety Lead

I've had the privilege of being the Carer Lead at **Cygnet Maidstone Hospital** for nearly five years. For me, it is essential to identify and connect with carers as early as possible. Ensuring that family members, friends, and carers feel involved and supported is a priority. I work hard to understand their experiences and advocate on their behalf. Many carers face challenges in knowing where to turn for information and support, and I am committed to ensuring they receive the help they need and deserve from our Carer Support team here at Cygnet Maidstone Hospital, from the moment they begin their caregiving journey. I've been involved in developing and driving forward our carers' work from challenging policies to embedding Carer Awareness training. I also support staff in carer-related matters, facilitate Carer Support groups, and work closely with other Cygnet sites, listen to carers and carer charities to ensure a collaborative approach. My goal has always been to improve the way our services engage with carers and families.

I am proud of the work we've done over the years to strengthen the Carer Support at Cygnet Maidstone Hospital. Our ongoing efforts have helped us create a more supportive, open, and compassionate environment for carers. This commitment was recognised in July, when we were awarded the **Star 1, Triangle of Care Accreditation**.



**Jutta Neuman**  
Carers' Lead Cygnet Maidstone

The fact that mum is involved in my care has such a great impact on my recovery. She supports me and our relationship is getting stronger and more resilient. She will be the main support when I get discharged.

In my last hospital they didn't really involve her. Here at Cygnet Maidstone they actively involve her in my ward rounds and around my care planning. Especially our Social Worker on the ward is putting a lot effort in this.

**Patient on Roseacre Ward**

The involvement of unpaid carers in the care of a mental health patient can have a significant impact on their recovery. Here are a few examples of how. This is by no means an exhaustive list!

**Emotional Support** – Carers can help to alleviate the feelings of a patient feeling isolated or alone and as though no-one is on their side.

**Continuity of Care** – Carers are often that constant, in the constant changes of wards, staff, Social Workers and Care Coordinators etc. For some carers, the journey with a patient has been a long and exhausting one!

**Advocacy** – This is a big one!! Carers provide that presence and without a carer there to advocate for a patient, their views and wishes may be unheard.

**Education and Awareness** – Carers bridging that gap between hospital and home. They are often the ones who can paint that picture of what it was like for a patient growing up. They can share things that the referral documents cannot capture. For example, painting a better picture of what a patient's life been like before becoming unwell and ending up in hospital?

**Community and Social Integration** – Carers often provide that support long after they have left our service. They remain the constant beyond their hospital admission.

**Challenges for carers** – Often with their own scars and trauma from the journey, a carer recently said to me that they try and separate the behaviour from the person, and this really struck a chord with me. Imagine their feelings of exhaustion, fear, worry, longing, guilt, embarrassment and sometimes (sadly) shame. They are the ones continuing to love a patient when they may have done (or are continuing to do) things that may make them unlovable.

**Saskia Hills**  
Social Worker and Carers Lead Roseacre Ward

Carers play such an **important part** in the journey of our patients at Cygnet Maidstone. They have vital information about their loved ones which support us to understand the full picture, from what treatments may have worked before - to being able to tell staff their favourite TV show to support start conversations. **Carers feedback** help us provide more effective care to patients. We are always keen to hear from Carers as this supports us to improve our services and ensure we provide their loved ones with the best care possible.

**Laurie Burleton**  
Clinical Manager

# Voices from our hospital...

## The importance of self-care: Prioritising your well-being

It can be both rewarding and difficult to care for a loved one who has struggles with their mental health. As a carer, you likely invest a lot of time, effort, and emotion into meeting their needs. However, taking care of someone else may take its toll on your own mental, physical, and emotional well-being, resulting in 'carer burnout'. So it's critical to keep in mind that taking care of yourself is just as vital, and that you can better help your loved one when you make an investment in your own health.

**Self-care is essential; it is not a luxury.**

### Practical self-care strategies for carers

**Acknowledge your own needs:** Recognise that your health and wellbeing matter. Give yourself permission to rest, ask for help, or take a break when needed. Self-compassion goes a long way in sustaining resilience.

**Set boundaries:** To protect your own time and energy, it's critical to establish boundaries. Having designated 'off-duty' times, planning frequent breaks, or asking for extra help from other family members or experts could all be part of this.

**Build a support network:** Make local or online connections with support groups or other carers. It can be quite relieving to share your experiences with people who can relate, and they can also provide helpful advice and emotional support.

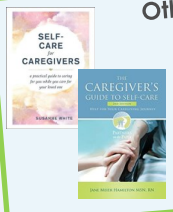
**Engage in activities:** Make time for activities that you enjoy and bring you mental peace and relaxation. Allowing for a few moments of quiet reflection can have huge benefits on your wellbeing.

**Seek professional support:** Talking with a therapist or a counsellor can help you process the challenges you may face as a carer. They can offer you tools to manage stress and improve your own emotional health

Prioritising **yourself** when your loved one is struggling can be hard, but **taking care of yourself** does not hinder your role as a carer – it enhances it. By **looking after your own needs**, you'll be better equipped to provide the love and support that your loved one needs and fosters a stable and supportive environment for their recovery journey.

**Miya Kumar**  
Assistant Psychologist

### Other resources:



Some book recommendations are: 'The care givers guild to self-care' by Jane Meier Hamilton, and 'Self-care for caregivers: A practical guide to caring for you while you care for your loved one' by Susanne White

### Carer Support Group via zoom

**Cygnets Hospitals**  
**Godden Green, Maidstone & Woking**

What those who attend have to say about the group:

- Being able to discuss problems and listen to others
- Opportunity to meet professionals from the hospital
- Finding different solutions to issues.
- Lovely group of like minded people who are willing to listen and support you

**Please ask for the link and our leaflet if you haven't received it yet!**

**Wednesday**

**04 December @18:00**

**Speaker:**  
Neil Barker  
(Occupational Therapist)

Topic: Activity PRN: Exploring Meaningful Occupation As and When Required

### ADHD Referral Process



If a patient has concerns about ADHD and would like a review regarding this, please refer them to the GP, who will be able to support with this type of referral.

A self-assessment form will be required which patients can be supported to complete by ward staff. Once complete, this should be returned to the Physical Health Team who can forward this to the GP.

**Please note, this form must be completed and returned before an appointment will be confirmed with the**

## Voices from our Cygnet Carer Ambassadors

Carers can often feel isolated in their role and as someone who provides care, I can see the importance of forming that bridge between mental health services and the value carers provide. As one of the cygnet's carer network ambassadors, I have been working to promote better understanding of carers, improving trust between the mental health services and carers, and also working towards collaboration when it comes to carer awareness.

As a carer ambassador, I seek to use the collective voice of carers so their perspectives are heard and considered regarding policies and programs. This includes bringing carers together for engagement events, because it is important we try to learn together.

When I was caring for my mother, I learnt how important carers should be included, respected and valued. Isolation was one of the common themes when I was providing care. I felt at times I was not included in policy discussions, there was also a lack of carer awareness and there certainly was a need for carer peer support networks. I agree these things take time to develop, but it is within the rights of carers to receive such support and be valued to help develop such services.

As a carer ambassador, I work hard to reduce stigma through my books, blogs and video lectures. I often try to speak about my carer experiences at carer network events. Raising such awareness leads to a more compassionate and inclusive experience where carers can feel empowered.

My view is that Carers provide that unique insight into the needs of those they care for. As it is coming up to Carers Rights day. It is the perfect time for [professionals to learn](#) about the rights of carers. This is also the perfect time for carers to acknowledge their own rights and use them.



**Matthew McKenzie**  
Carer Activist  
Cygnet Carer Ambassador  
[www.caringmindblog.com](http://www.caringmindblog.com)

## A Carers Journey

A couple of weeks ago I attended an event at a Cygnet Hospital, and met three new Carers; a husband, sister and the mother of a new service user who had recently been admitted to the hospital - and they were in a state of shock. Everything happening to them was a new and frightening experience, they didn't know what was going on with their loved one; their wife, sister and daughter respectively, and they simply didn't know where to start or who to speak to about her, and the last thing on their mind was being told they were 'Carers'.

The whole world of Mental Health is brand new territory to most of us; with its language, its labels, the system, the processes, the new job titles and acronyms, the diagnoses and medications. And then the difficulties with the illness itself - it's bewildering when the person you love changes unrecognizably and is behaving in strange new ways and thinking odd new things, things we simply find it hard to relate to and can't comprehend.

I was in a similar state myself for years - shocked by my sons strange beliefs and irrational fears: he started hearing voices and feeling threatened by unknown forces, believing that everyone was plotting to hurt him and living in constant fear - I later discovered this was *psychosis* and these thoughts were *delusional thinking* - but learning how to deal with or respond to this new character is an ongoing process.

Finally my son was Sectioned after a six-month period of escalation of his psychosis in to crisis after crisis - it seemed we just couldn't access help anywhere - until his third appearance in Court in less than the space of a month, when finally the Youth Intervention Team at the Magistrates Court stepped in and asked '*what's going on at home?*' We both burst in to tears and explained that our son was experiencing voices and paranoia, and escaping in to substance abuse and dangerous, reckless and violent behaviours.

This was the very start of my 10 year journey in the Mental Health World, where I, as a now single parent, navigated my sons changing persona, his interactions with Mental Health Services and his Community Team (and Probation Officers), and his ins-and-outs of A&E, Police Holding Cells, Acute and PICU Wards and along the way Supported Housing and attempts to live together at our new home by the sea. After two years of this, following on from my wife's sudden death, my son was finally diagnosed with underlying conditions rather than 'substance-induced psychosis' and it was decided that a long-term placement should be found for him.

The next steps on my journey began, as after seven long months of looking, a specialist rehabilitation unit was found in London within Cygnet Services for him - and this bought with it some hope and some respite, but not for long. I had moved back to London to be nearer accessible services and support for my son, and this worked with his new placement too as I was able to visit him every week. But a few short months after he was moved to Cygnet Harrow, the country went in to Covid Lockdown, and visits became difficult and they impossible as the Ward became isolated.

My sons didn't respond well to not seeing me in person, he couldn't cope with the separation and increased restrictions, and his behaviour worsened in to physical aggression, disruptive abuse, and very visual and destructive self-harm. During this time my only communication with him were daily phone-calls and weekly online meetings and the odd Teams Ward Round, and it was during one of these online events that I was told that my son was 'too challenging to be managed on the Ward' and that they had referred him to a Medium Secure Unit, but that with restrictions with travel and so-on in place that this probably wouldn't happen in the foreseeable time.

It came as a surprise when less than a fortnight later a place for him had been found - in Bury (north of Manchester) - *where on earth is that?* I asked, and on hearing the reply, I said *he can't move there that's ridiculous - how on earth am I supposed to visit him there?* Don't worry, it won't be for long, I was told. *Well, it's not happening,* I said, and the reply was, he's already on transport, he left an hour ago...

And so a new chapter in our journey began, as my son entered a Secure Ward some 230 miles away from home, with new restrictions, a new environment, new characters to get along with, new personnel, and new travel arrangements (and expenses) that added up to a 6+ hour journey each way or a 16+ hour travel day to come to terms with. After a year it also opened up another chapter when I was invited to a 'Carers Event' at Cygnet Bury, to which I responded '**but I'm not a Carer**', and was told, well, you're a parent and you're invited too - and we'll contribute towards your travel by getting you a hotel for the night. This was a game-changer, and I said *great, I'll be there...!*

A few months later at a second Carers Event in Bury, where the term 'Carer' was beginning to sound relatable, I actually involved myself in some of the discussions, and no doubt came across as angry, frustrated, and belligerent. But watching in the corner of the room was a member of the Cygnet Head Office team who came up and spoke to me afterwards - 'you have a lot of energy and passion', she said, 'but it's all negative - if you really want to make things better you need to use that energy more positively. Why don't you come to our next Carers Event in London?'

This was the real beginning of my Carer's Story as a 'Carer', up to this point I had always been simply 'the parent' looking after his son as best he could, but now I started to realise I was part of something far far bigger - A Parent Carer - one of the one million plus parents, husbands, wives, children, brothers, sisters, lovers, friends or others caring for their loved ones suffering from Mental Health illnesses or conditions - and all largely unpaid. It took me a long time to come to terms with the fact that I was carer despite my son actually being 'cared for' in Hospital by others - I was still caring on a daily basis - the worry, the emotional support to my son provided in daily phone calls and monthly visits, the life and financial admin on his behalf, the team meetings and the Teams meetings, the Mental Health and medical admin and arrangements, and the constant stress and anxiety about his life and his future.

It was also the beginning of me sharing my Carers Journey - which I was first invited to do back at Cygnet Harrow in September 2023, and, this being my sons first long-term placement and the traumatic time we'd all been through with Covid Lockdowns was incredibly moving and nerve-wracking for me seeing many of the same staff there who remembered my son with kindness and sympathy.

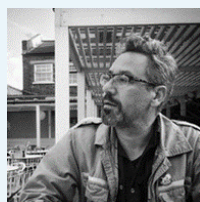
This was my official start as a **Carers Ambassador** - a role I have now been in for just over a year - and in that one year I have learned far far more than I ever did in the previous 9 years - I have learned the difficulties and challenges faced in keeping very ill people safe and well, alongside other people with equal difficulties and I have, as I did in Harrow that time, come to deeply respect the members of staff who support and care for my son, and the thousands of others with challenging and complex needs.

Next time I will go in to the detail of being a Carers Ambassador (although I prefer the term, Representative), but for now, back to our friends I met at the start. This was the start of their journey - and they had question after question, whilst going through everything I had; anxiety, stress, bewilderment and confusion about what on earth is happening and how do we fit in to this new reality? They sat opposite the Mental Health team at the hospital at a Carers 'Drop-In' Event and they didn't know where to start. I'd like to feel that I made a difference that day using my experience to bridge the 'gap' between the new carers and the professionals and make them both feel comfortable with each other and letting them know that there were no 'silly questions, and starting to break down that gap, and letting them know that these professionals and support workers were also caring and kind individuals who also wanted the best for their loved-one..

More importantly, I hope they came away from that Event beginning to see themselves as Carers too and realising they are not alone - millions of us have been through similar journeys, we've been there before, and although we might be one step, or many miles further down the road we can offer support, companionship, community, and the benefit of our shared experiences - it's all there, but for one small step - saying:

***I'm a Carer too!***

**Julian de Takats**  
Carer/ Single Father  
Cygnet Carer Ambassador



### The King's Fund podcast

Big ideas in health and care

**Podcast**  
Andrew McCracken et al  
**Policy, finance and performance**

**The government's first 100 days and what it means for health and care**

What impact has the first 100 days of the new Labour government had on health and care? Join Andrew McCracken, Charlotte Wickens and Siva Anandaciva as they explore what's happened, what...

14 October 2024 • 33 minute listen

**Podcast**  
Siva Anandaciva et al  
**Health and care services**

**Let's talk about social prescribing**

What is social prescribing? How does it fit with other health and care services and what does it aim to achieve? Find out in our podcast episode.

26 July 2024

### The Mental Health Act is



changing to give patients a greater say over their care and to improve their experiences, whilst protecting them, staff and the general public. But how is it changing?...Find out more: [healthmedia.blog.gov.uk/2024/11/06/improving-the-mental-health-act-what-you-need-to-know/](https://healthmedia.blog.gov.uk/2024/11/06/improving-the-mental-health-act-what-you-need-to-know/)

### Not registered with a GP practice?



Being registered will help you get the right care when you need it.

Please register with your GP as a Carer. Your GP

can help you getting the right support and help if needed.:

Referrals for counselling, Let's talk, CBT etc.



## Social Prescribing Support

What is **Social Prescribing**? Social prescribing links individuals, including unpaid carers and those they support with resources to improve their wellbeing, focusing particularly on those who may otherwise not receive the help they need. This personalized support can be provided at GP surgeries, community venues, in the home, or remotely via phone or email.

### How Can Social Prescribers Help?



Link Workers offer support in a variety of ways, including: **Financial and benefits advice:** Connecting individuals with

relevant support services.

**Paperwork assistance:** Helping with applications such as Blue Badge permits.

**Access to essentials:** Guidance on food banks and essential equipment.

**Household support:** Referrals for cleaning, gardening, or handyman services.

**Community connections:** Helping reduce isolation by linking people to befriending services, clubs, or exercise classes.

In some GP surgeries, Social Prescribers focus specifically on **carer-related issues**, offering health checks for carers or acting as Carer Champions. The services available can vary from practice to practice, so check your **GP practice** website or waiting room for more information.



### Recognise Me!

Do you support a friend or family member living with severe mental illness in secure services?

We recognise the feelings of frustration, isolation, and often stigma that can be experienced when supporting someone in that setting, not to mention how challenging and overwhelming it can be to navigate the secure care systems.

You're not alone, come and join us! We are a group of carers that meet online the 3rd Wednesday of each month from 5pm - 7:30pm.

We offer a safe relaxed space so members can talk freely and without judgement. We provide support and encouragement, share experiences, information, and learning, so our members feel less isolated and more empowered in what can be a very disempowering position.

For more information contact Sibena or Maria, the group coordinators at: [recogniseme@rethink.org](mailto:recogniseme@rethink.org)



## Carer Support Team

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