

The Triangle of Care – Guidance for Community Health Services

Guidance for Implementing the Triangle of Care in community health services

Introduction

The Triangle of Care was developed by carers to help build a therapeutic alliance in mental health care between carers, service users (patients) and professionals. Since its launch Carers Trust has worked with carers' organisations and providers to implement the Triangle of Care in their services.

The success of the Triangle of Care has led to providers rolling the model out across services beyond mental health including: learning disabilities, substance misuse and older people's mental health. Due to the similar structure of these services, Triangle of Care is easily adapted to them without the need to change the original guidance and self-assessment. However, many NHS service providers are integrated trusts and provide physical health services; these services may be less familiar with the Triangle of Care model or struggle to see how it can be adapted to meet their service model.

As part of the Triangle of Care membership scheme members are required to roll out the Triangle of Care model across all of their services, a number of providers have struggled with how they can implement the current self-assessment in services that do not follow the service model as it's presented in the Triangle of Care.

This new guidance is aimed at managers and staff in services that are often delivered in the community both in people's own homes e.g. district nursing and community clinics (for example podiatry) but also can be used in "district" community hospitals, both in outpatient and inpatient settings. The self-assessment is designed to be applicable to any service (**although a little imagination is always recommended**) and the guidance is designed to provide recommendations on things that should be considered when implementing the Triangle of Care. **It is still advised that staff read the original Triangle of Care guide and reflect on the carer journey and experience in relation to their service.**

The Triangle of Care: A Carer Engagement Approach

Carers frequently report that their involvement is not adequately recognised and that they are not appropriately informed and supported by professionals. The Triangle of Care was developed to address this, by helping professionals to see the benefits of carer inclusion and support with a self-assessment tool which enabled them to look at their service model and develop it to full carer inclusion.

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Carers often feel excluded from treatment decisions and failures in communication mean that that are often thwarted from being as effective as they want to be when supporting the patient or person with care needs.

The link between patient and professional often defines the service, but in most cases the bond between patient and carer has not only pre-existed this but will continue for long after.

The Triangle of Care places an onus on carers and professionals to forge a trusting relationship, and then work with patients to ensure the best treatment and support for all.

Carers wish to be trusted, involved and become more effective; services may have traditional ways of doing things that create obstacles to achieving this. The Triangle of Care works to move a service model to one of inclusion and support.

The Triangle of Care model is based on six standards, which if implemented will help a service be more carer aware, inclusive and supportive. In addition a service will ensure more consistent support for patients as carers will feel more confident and informed.

The Six Standards

The six standards and what they mean in practice are:

1. Carers and the essential role they play are identified at first contact or as soon as possible thereafter.
 - Carers' views and knowledge are sought, shared used and regularly updated as overall care plans are developed.
2. Staff are "carer aware" and trained in carer engagement strategies.
 - Staff need to be aware of and welcome the valuable contribution carers can make and be mindful of carers' own needs.
 - Staff need knowledge, training and support to become carer aware.
3. Policy and practice protocols re: confidentiality and sharing information, are in place.
 - Guidelines on confidentiality and for information sharing which is a three way process between professional, patient and carer.
 - Information sharing forms and protocols.
 - Advance statements and protocols.
4. Defined post(s) responsible for carers are in place, including:
 - Carers lead or champion for all wards and teams irrespective of which service.
5. A carer introduction to the service and staff is available, with a relevant range of information across the care pathway, including:

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- An introductory letter from the ward or service explaining the nature of the service provided and who to contact, including out of hours.
 - An appointment with a named member of the team to discuss their views and involvement.
 - Ward orientation/induction procedure and leaflet.
 - Carer information packs.
 - Discharge planning and aftercare support.
6. A range of carer support services is available, including:
- Carer support.
 - Carer Needs Assessments and referral procedure
 - Carer education and training
 - Carer support groups

Things to Consider for Successfully Implementing the Triangle of Care

Services that are unfamiliar with the Triangle of Care will benefit from a period of reflection before implementing it in their services. You may want to consider the following and discuss it with your teams:

- Do staff understand what the term carer, young adult carer and young carer means?
- What does your service model currently have in place for carers?
- Where does most of your service delivery take place and what may be the benefits and challenges of engaging with carers in these spaces?
- Are staff familiar with legislation that enshrines carers' rights and how they must implement this?
- What are staff's feelings and opinions on carers?

These questions seem simple but they will help you develop a baseline for your service, for many the Triangle of Care doesn't seem like "rocket science" but for others it may appear to be a radical idea so it's important to do this preparation before both self-assessing your service and working to implement change.

A Work in Progress

The benefit of the Triangle of Care and the self-assessment tool enables frontline services to assess how well they are doing in achieving an organisation's existing policies and procedures in relation to carers. It empowers them to identify gaps in the service, barriers to fully implementing policies and to showcase good practice. The self-assessment will enable a service to establish a base line and work towards improvement and a culture of carer inclusion. It's important not to see Triangle of Care as a short term project or one-off self-assessment.