

While carers provide a valuable service to society and looking after family members or friends brings great rewards, there is growing evidence about the increased psychological distress, strain and overall health deterioration endured by carers. Carers Week research from 2018 found that 6 out of 10 people (61%) said their physical health has worsened as a result of caring, while 7 out of 10 (72%) said they have experienced mental ill health. Carers providing round the clock care are more than twice as likely to be in bad health than non-carers.

Although there are a number of clinical assessment tools already available to help measure carers' health and carers burden/strain e.g. the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) there are none that take into account the broader spectrum of the caring role/circumstances.

The Surrey Carers Well-being Tool aims to help health staff evaluate the impact that caring has on the carer's health. This tool is helpful in determining level of stress on carers and can be used to prioritise need and support plans for the carer. It has been designed to help to support and inform your clinical decision around the role of the carer.

Each carer's circumstances will be unique to them and therefore the impact on their health will differ. They will frequently be unaware of the accumulative impact that caring can have. This process may in fact be the first time a health professional has asked them about their caring role and is therefore an opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of the carer looking after their own health.

The law

Under the new Care Act (Department of Health, 2014a) local authorities now have a duty to provide services to carers that prevent, reduce, or delay them developing a need for support. This needs to be done in cooperation with health. (Clause 3)

If a carer presents 'with need' it is your responsibility (provided consent has been given) to refer them on to social services for a formal carers' assessment. This is true for those new to caring and those who may have been caring for some time. It applies to all carers young or old. *Care Act 2014 and Children and Families Act 2014.

Practitioners Carers Well-being Tool:

The following list of statements may help you understand whether the carer is under particular strain and whether a referral to support services may help mitigate against this.

"I am going to read a list of things that other carers have found difficult. Would you tell me if any of these apply to you?"

		Not Applicable	Level of impact	Level of impact	Level of impact	Comments for score
		0	Low – 1	Medium-2	High – 3	
1	My sleep is disturbed (i.e. because cared for person is up at night and/or due to carers own worry/stress)					
2	Caring takes a lot of my time (consider not only time for caring but travel time for remote carers and those with a multiple caring roles)					

3	It's a physical strain (due to moving and handling or physical exhaustion)					
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4	I do not have the necessary skills or training to undertake the caring role. (i.e. continence management, pain management)					
5	I already have a pre-existing physical/emotional condition which has been made worse by my caring role					
6	I do not feel physically capable of fulfil my caring role due to my age, frailty, (i.e. does the carer have the physical energy to undertake a demanding caring role)					
7	I feel depressed/sad/low in spirits /anxious/apathetic/less positive than in the past and overwhelmed by my caring role. (Ask how regularly they experience these feelings, and do they notice this effects their ability to care– all the time, daily, weekly, monthly: if they feel depressed all the time or more often than not score high)					
8	My relationship/s is under strain due to caring (this can be a particular issue for parent carers but also can impact on other relationships)					
9	It is confining (e.g. carer is unable to leave cared for person, free time is restricted; he/she has been unable to go on holiday or continue learning/education)					
10	I feel isolated and on my own (isolation and lack of support might prove a high burden and result in distress or physical/mental health problems). Carers often feel trapped by their circumstances					
11	There has been many adjustments to daily life due to caring role(there is disruption to routine, he/she is worried about their employment or had to give up employment; please note for young carers and young adult carers this may mean that they are missing out of education opportunities or there is no time for social activities)					
13	There are other demands on my time (e.g. other caring or family responsibilities, grandchildren)					
14	It is upsetting to find the 'cared for person' has changed so much from their former self (he/she is different from how they used to be causing upset, anxiety, embarrassment due to challenging behaviour)					
15	I feel under financial strain due to the caring role					
16	As a family we are not able to do the things other families can do.					

<p>Are there any safeguarding concerns that have been identified as part of the CWT for either the carer or the cared for person – Refer to Surrey safeguarding procedures Adults/Children</p>					
<p>TOTAL Regardless of score a Carers Prescription is recommended before the patient is discharged. For a medium to high score it is recommended that you advise the Carer to apply for a Carers Assessment</p>					

A low score would be <16
A medium score would be 16 >32
A high score would be 33 > 48