

5 December 2017

Working with and supporting the needs of mental health carers in the ACMHS

In articulating how the ACMHS can incorporate the needs of mental health carers, I read the following in *Principle 1. Recovery-oriented and person-centred of the ACMH MoC Version 4.0 2017 (pg 17.)* which identifies the importance of recognising family systems.

It states;

The ACMHS aims to: (...) Recognise family systems, acknowledging the roles that family and carers play and, in collaboration with the person, involve families, carers and Nominated Persons in treatment and care decisions, consistent with person centred care. As part of the approach to service delivery, staff will provide education to families and carers, supporting them to address their needs and suggesting links with supports wherever appropriate.

This beautifully summarises three key components of what carers need from the ACMHS, however it is our recommendation that this is so fundamental that it would be beneficial to embed this principle within all documentation. It would also be recommended that it is expanded in a section of the document to ensure consistency of interpretation and is considered a key component of staff recruitment, orientation and training.

The three key components that are incorporate in this statement are;

1. Involving family, carers, nominated persons in treatment and care decisions. Seeing the carer as a resource and as a partner in care. Understand and respecting their role and listening to their experiences.
2. Education staff will provide to families and carers to build capacity, knowledge and confidence in their caring role. With greater understanding and skills to cope with caring for the person with the mental illness, outcomes are improved for both the carer and the person with the mental illness. They will also be more able to participate meaningfully in the treatment decisions and discussions.
3. Support carers to address their needs and suggest links with supports where appropriate – this is crucial. Research has shown that mental health carers experience poor health outcomes, including an increased rate of mental illness themselves. They are also more likely to delay seeking treatment and were recently identified to be an at-risk group for family violence in the ACT. In a recent Mental Health Carers Voice Workshop, carers identified that they needed to be proactively encouraged to seek supports for themselves early in their caring role. One carer said, *“We all know we should do it, but you need someone to tell you, do it! It feels selfish, but it will help you to be able to care for them and you need permission almost.”* Especially within the ACMHS context, it is beneficial for staff to have knowledge of carers supports and where to access them and to understand that carers have needs that are separate from their caring role.

Within the ACMHS MoC Workforce Plan Consultation Paper v0.6 – there is some mention within the training plan for CRS and ACOS of Family and Social systems interventions and in the Individual

Therapies on Family Assessments and Family Therapy. We recommend that, in addition to this, there is a component of training that explores with all staff how the above principle looks in practice.

There is also mention that the social workers will undertake a significant amount of the work with families based upon the position description in the plan. This is highly applauded as social workers come with a great framework for working with complex families. However, the position description seems open for entry level social workers. If this is the intention there is a need to have a more extensive training program to embed their studies into practice in a new service. It would also be a recommendation for the Allied Health staff to have a discipline specific senior clinician across the ACMHS, ie. identified senior psychologist, senior social worker and senior occupational therapist to support those with less experience in maintaining their skills and promote their specific function within the model.

Thank you for your time and if you have in further questions regarding our comments please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alexandra Scetrine".

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