

4 CARER SUPPORT STRATEGY

Introduction

- 4.1 NHS Somerset is committed to addressing the needs of staff who have caring responsibilities.
- 4.2 A carer is someone who looks after a child, partner, relative, friend or neighbour and is not formally employed to carry out their caring role.
- 4.3 Carers can be anyone, at any age and they can care for someone either on a long-term basis, such as a child or an older relative, or on a short-term basis following an accident or illness. Balancing carer responsibilities with work can be difficult, particularly as some carers are reluctant to identify themselves as having carer responsibilities from fear of jeopardising future career prospects. In addition, there may be staff who do not think of themselves as a carer.
- 4.4 It is estimated that three out of five staff will be a carer at some stage in their working life and that health professionals in the NHS are more likely to take on the caring role in the family. The peak age for caring is currently 45–64.
- 4.5 Many carers will be experienced employees in senior positions, and if NHS Somerset does not make every effort to retain these staff, NHS Somerset risks losing the knowledge and skills of a core group of staff.
- 4.6 By providing support for staff with caring responsibilities, it helps NHS Somerset become an employer of choice by demonstrating to staff that they are valued and respected. This is good for moral and ensures that the knowledge and skills of these staff are not lost to the organisation.

Intended Outcomes

- 4.7 The intended outcomes of this strategy are as follows:
- to demonstrate a world class standard in the provision of carer support
 - for NHS Staff Survey results to be positive with NHS Somerset showing a year on year improvement and NHS Somerset being in the upper quartile on the provision of flexible working
 - to understand and address carer needs of employees
 - to build inter-agency partnerships in order to develop high quality, flexible support solutions for staff with caring responsibilities
 - there is evidence of improvement in recruitment and retention rates as a result of the Trust's actions in providing carer support

Policies

4.8 NHS Somerset is committed to reviewing and developing policies which meet the needs of staff with caring responsibilities. These policies will be reviewed and developed in line with good practice and in partnership with the Staff Side. The carer policies which will be reviewed and developed are as follows:

- Special Leave Policy
- Flexible Working Policy
- Job Share Policy
- Supporting Staff Policy
- Parental Leave Policy
- Maternity Leave Policy
- Paternity Leave Policy
- Adoption Leave Policy
- Employment Break Policy
- Equal Opportunities Policy

Services and Support

4.9 To provide staff with appropriate support and services to help them with their caring needs, NHS Somerset has appointed an Improving Lives Advisor.

4.10 The role of the Improving Lives Advisor is to:

- provide information, advice and support to employees who are carers
- advise staff on the inter-agency support available to carers
- advise staff on the policies of NHS Somerset and on the support available
- signpost employees to self-help groups, carer support organisations, and carer support help lines and websites
- provide access to information on emergency childcare and care provision
- develop a network of Staff Support Advisors

- ensure all staff have access to information on local childcare linked to the Somerset Children's Information Services and other relevant organisations
- support staff during and after maternity leave to maximise maternity leave return rates
- administer the Childcare Vouchers Scheme

4.11 It is recognised that not all staff are able to take advantage of some care support options available to them, either due to financial restraints or clinical commitments. NHS Somerset will therefore support these staff by giving them:

- reasonable time off to deal with an emergency
- reasonable time off work to deal with an emergency involving a dependant

Management Development

4.12 Managers will be trained so that they understand their responsibilities in supporting staff with carer responsibilities. The training will ensure that managers:

- recognise the benefits of supporting staff with caring responsibilities
- recognise the need to support staff in a way that is fair, equitable and transparent
- understand the need to identify what the employee's caring responsibilities are in the long term and short term, what the likely impact on work is going to be, and what support options may be appropriate to provide
- understand the need to maintain ongoing two-way dialogue with the staff member who has caring responsibilities
- understand the circumstances where it may be necessary to refuse a request for flexible working, such as:
 - * where there is a substantial cost involved
 - * where there is an inability to re-organise work among existing staff
 - * where there is an inability to recruit additional staff
 - * where there is a detrimental impact on quality of service

- * where there is a detrimental impact on performance
- * where there is a planned structural change

Conclusion

- 4.13 This Carer Support Strategy sets out the key priorities for NHS Somerset to support staff with carer responsibilities in the workplace during the period 2009/10 to 2011/12.
- 4.14 This strategy will be subject to full discussion with Staff Side Representatives in accordance with normal policy.
- 4.15 A comprehensive Action Plan has been developed to support the Carer Support Strategy.