

18 September 2018

**Response from the Royal College of Nursing Wales to the Health, Social Services & Sport Committee's inquiry into the Impact of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 in relation to Carers**

The Royal College of Nursing Wales is grateful for the opportunity to respond to this consultation and would like to raise a number of points in relation to the inquiry:

***Raising awareness and identification of carers***

- I. It is widely understood that demographic changes mean that not only are there more unpaid carers than ever before, but there has also been a significant increase in the proportion who are caring for over 20 hours a week and a rise in the number for those caring 50 hours a week or more, as demonstrated by statistics from the last census. There are currently 370,000 carers, with over 100,000 people in Wales providing over 50 hours of unpaid care per week. Figures from Social Care Wales report that there are approximately 30,000 young carers (under the age of 25) in Wales, the highest proportion of all UK countries.
- II. Despite these high numbers, it is known that many carers, and the healthcare professionals that work with carers, do not always identify individuals as carers. It's important that carers are informed of their rights as carers, and that appropriate information is available to them about the support services that they can access. It is also vital that professionals and clinicians who work with carers are supported to identify carers, and have an understanding of how this should impact on care planning. Healthcare professionals working alongside carers should be fully cognisant of what the rights of carers are under the act, and be supported to signpost carers towards the information and services they need.
- III. We know from the Carers Trust Wales that there are some good examples in Wales where a ward-based carers support worker has had a huge impact on supporting staff to identify and engage with carers, providing significant benefits to both. This has demonstrated that having specialist support workers for carers within hospitals can be a really effective way to support clinical staff and carers alike, and to enhance communication between carers and healthcare teams.

***Assessment & support services delivered by Local Authorities***

- IV. According to the Carers Wales 'Track the Act' programme, whilst some local authorities have clear and workable strategies for ensuring they are meeting their statutory duties, there are significant differences between these strategies and consequently in how councils are actually delivering services. This means that some carers experience a 'post code lottery' of how and when they receive their needs assessment (if they receive one at all) and the services they subsequently receive (if any services are received at all).

- V. This is an indication that not all councils are meeting their statutory duty to offer and undertake a Carer's needs assessment, and therefore not all carers are benefiting from the new rights that the Act has brought them. Welsh Government must ensure that there is appropriate monitoring and evaluation of the services available and the wider impact that the Act is having on carers.

### ***The need for respite care***

- VI. The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 places carers on an equal legal footing as those being cared for. Local Authorities have a duty to actively promote and provide preventative service, including offering a carer's needs assessment, regardless of the type of care provided, the financial means of the carer or what the level of support needed might be. However, financial pressures on Local Authorities has meant the availability of services which can provide valuable and meaningful respite have reduced, and carers' access to respite is becoming increasingly difficult.
- VII. Without proper respite, the health of carers themselves can be compromised. This not only impacts on the well-being of the carer themselves, but in turn affects their ability to promote and maintain the well-being of the individual being cared for. We know from research by Carers Wales, that the health of carers is often negatively impacted by their role as a carer. This is demonstrated by statistics that 59% of carers reported worsened physical health since they had become carers and 70% saying they had suffered mental ill health since taking on their responsibilities as a carer. The contributing factors to this are numerous and indicative of the need to ensure that carers are properly cared for, and that respite and support services are readily available.

### ***Unpaid Carers & Nurse Education Placements***

- VIII. A model which the Royal College of Nursing has been advocating for some time is the innovative idea of placing nursing students in the homes of unpaid carers, thereby providing relief for carers who often receive little to no respite from their roles as carers, whilst also providing placements for nursing students. It is often acknowledged that there is a lack of variety in nurse education placements, particularly outside of hospital settings. These placements would provide valuable exposure for student nurses to a different care setting, potentially encouraging more nurses to work in the care sector.
- IX. Careful account and consideration would clearly be needed around the requirements for supervision and mentoring, and there would need to be clear lines of responsibility and accountability. With the right processes and governance procedures in place however, these placements could widen access to the caring profession, whilst also assist in overcoming the issue of the lack of support and help available to those with unpaid caring duties.

### ***Education & Employment Opportunities***

- X. In addition to these education opportunities for nurses, the Royal College also maintains that there should be opportunities for unpaid carers to be recognised for the skills and expertise they possess through appropriate accreditation, providing qualifications and potential career opportunities providing nursing students with placements in the community provides a great opportunity for relieving pressures, giving unpaid carers the chance to gain qualifications. Of course these opportunities would not appeal to everybody, and there would be no obligation for carers to develop their skills if they did not wish to do so. For those that did however, not only would this give recognition to unpaid carers for the incredible job they do, it would also enable them to have a career beyond their immediate caring responsibilities in the longer term.

### **About the Royal College of Nursing**

The RCN is the world's largest professional union of nurses, representing over 430,000 nurses, midwives, health visitors and nursing students, including over 25,000 members in Wales. The majority of RCN members work in the NHS with around a quarter working in the independent sector. The RCN works locally, nationally and internationally to promote standards of care and the interests of patients and nurses, and of nursing as a profession. The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with its own National Boards for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The RCN is a major contributor to nursing practice, standards of care, and public policy as it affects health and nursing. The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in practice and shapes health policies.