

the informed service user and carer

Introduction

Needing to seek professional advice about a health or social care problem can be a daunting prospect. It can cause apprehension for a number of reasons. There is an inevitable power imbalance. Service users and carers may feel intimidated by professionals. Having to discuss difficult, embarrassing and otherwise private things with a stranger, not knowing what to expect, how your situation will be assessed or what the outcome might be are all potential sources of concern and anxiety.

These questions are designed to help prepare service users and carers for contact with social care organisations. They optimise the participation of service users in the decision-making process by enabling them to be fully informed about practice, services and resources.

Guidance for use

The following are some of the key questions that service users and carers have found useful and important to ask. Staff in social care organisations should be able to provide you with the answers to these questions.

A good organisation would be drawing your attention to your right to be given information and ask questions.

This card is likely to be particularly helpful at the beginning of your contact with a social care organisation. It may also be useful to go back to them at a later stage, when you may be feeling a bit more confident. A good organisation will treat you with respect when asking for or receiving a service.

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Questions

Information about services

- What information (including written) can you give me about your organisation?
- What range of services do you offer to people in my situation?
- Are there any other organisations that provide these services?
- How are decisions made about the service I will receive, and how will I be involved in this?
- How quickly will the service I have been recommended for be available?
- What can you tell me about the quality and effectiveness of the service you are recommending?

Information about policies

- Do you have information or policies available about:
 - equal opportunities?
 - anti-discriminatory practice?
 - complaints?
 - confidentiality?

Qualifications/Skills/Experience

- Can you tell me what the different job/professional titles of people in your agency mean? What skills do they have and how might they be able to help me?
- What qualifications, skills and experience do you have and how will they help you to help me?

Advocacy

- Is there a local advocacy group?
- Am I entitled to an advocate?

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Access to services

- How quickly will I be seen?
- Can I see a male/female worker?
- Can I see somebody from the same/similar ethnic background?
- Can I bring someone with me when I attend appointments?
- Is there disabled access to your office?
- Do you offer interpreting services?
- Is there any financial assistance available to enable me to attend meetings (e.g. a case conference or a family group meeting)?

Assessment

- What happens during an assessment?
- Who is involved in the assessment process and why?
- What happens if I do not agree with the outcome/decision?
- If I want a second opinion, how can this be arranged?

Refusing a service

- Can I refuse the service you are offering?
- If my decision to refuse a service is overridden, what are my rights of appeal?
- Is there any help I can get if I want to challenge this decision?

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Confidentiality

- Will what I say be confidential and are there any circumstances where confidentiality would be breached? If so, what are they and how would I know about it?
- Will you share information about me with other team members or people from other organisations? If so, who?
- Can I see the information you record about me? What information am I entitled to see and how would I go about it?
- What is the policy about seeing my child's file?
- If other people have access to my file, how will I be informed?
- Will you be sharing information about me with others, such as people in my family or other professionals?

Feedback and Complaints

- If I would like to comment favourably on the service I receive, how can I make my views known?
- How do I make a complaint?
- Can I get independent help if I want to make a complaint about the service I receive?

Useful references

- Gray, M. (2002) *The Resourceful Patient*, Oxford: Rosetta Press.
- Harding, T. and Beresford, P. (1996) 'The standards we expect: What service users and carers want from social workers', London: National Institute for Social Work.