**Carers UK – Carers Partnership Health and Wellbeing Alliance**

**Virtual wards carer leaflet**

Below is a suggested core text template to support sites to develop their own unpaid carer information leaflet for virtual wards.

These first two pages are for context and guidance and are not meant to be included for carers. They explain the purpose of the leaflet and how it was developed.

Please insert local information where text has been highlighted red.

This leaflet aims to cover different types of virtual ward including Hospital at Home. Frailty and ARI (Acute Respiratory Infection) are the most common but other types are being developed.

**Purpose is to:**

* Form part of the suite of leaflets designed to support frailty or other virtual wards.
* Designed to be tailored by local virtual wards with local logos, design, etc.
* Designed to be handed out to unpaid carers/emailed, etc.
* Provide a first step for unpaid carers to understand their role and to feel engaged and involved
* Provide a prompt and resource for virtual ward teams to include and involve unpaid carers.
* Ensure early signposting to support to help the unpaid carer manage other aspects of their lives whilst also caring – i.e. from the system to the carer.

**Why this content?**

* It is designed to be short
* Many people will not recognise themselves as unpaid carers and this helps the process.
* Many people are not aware of the support that can be provided to unpaid carers.
* It is designed to work with a more in-depth Q&A developed with carers by Carers UK which is aimed at empowering carers and improving engagement.

**Creation, consultation and involvement pathway:**

* This leaflet has been drafted by Carers UK as part of our Health and Wellbeing Alliance work with Carers Trust. Engagement and input has included a number of key stakeholders within health, social care, the voluntary sector and unpaid carers who are experts by experience. It has been fully shared with NHS England who have had the opportunity of input and expert comment.
* Young carers are beyond the scope of this leaflet. Information and advice needs to be tailored to their needs and codesigned separately.

**Links to legislation**

* This leaflet draws on the legislative responsibilities under the Care Act 2014 and the Health and Care Act 2022.

**A carers’ guide to virtual wards**

* Carers UK is developing a carer’s guide developed with unpaid carers and based on their common questions around virtual wards/hospital discharge/managing conditions. This is separate from this carer information leaflet which can be tailored by local organisations. The guide is designed to provide better up-front engagement i.e. a “carer activation measure”. The carers’ guide can also be used by virtual wards teams to check if they are following the right pathways for carers internally.

**What next?**

Carers UK will be continuing work on virtual wards with Carers Trust and NHSE as part of the Carers Partnership for 2023/24 under the Health and Wellbeing Alliance. Our plans include:

* A Carer Pathway for services to understand where to support unpaid carers.
* A Carers’ Checklist for practitioners – based on what has been asked for by people working in virtual wards.
* Updating our explainer for virtual wards here: <https://www.carersuk.org/briefings/a-policy-briefing-regarding-virtual-wards/>
* Pulling resources into one area to make access easier.

**Who to contact if you have comments about this work or this document?**

Please contact: policy@carersuk.org

**Date: May 2023**

***Virtual ward information leaflet for unpaid carers – core text for use locally.***

**Virtual ward contact information:**

If the person you care for feels unwell outside of these hours, please follow the advice your local virtual ward teams have provided:

Insert any additional contacts here:

Thinking of providing care and support, unpaid, to a family member or a friend?

The purpose of this leaflet is to give you some information to help you if you are providing or about to provide unpaid care. The patient will also have been given a leaflet which provides useful information and which you should try to read, too.

Remember, you have a legal right about whether or not to provide unpaid care to another adult. If you don’t feel comfortable providing care, you must raise this with the virtual wards team.

Please note that if you under 18 years old and a young carer, separate advice will apply to you.

What does providing unpaid care mean?

Families and friends sometimes help or support someone they know who is ill, disabled or who has become frail e.g. a family member, a close friend or neighbour.

This support might include helping someone in their own home or over the phone and can include things like:

* Helping someone with medication, reminding them, collecting it or helping to give medication.
* Providing daily support such as helping them move around the house, making meals for them, cleaning or other chores.
* Providing support with mental health or prompting, reminding if someone is forgetful or even supervision if someone finds tasks difficult to manage.
* Emotional support like helping someone manage anxiety.
* Helping manage money, paid care or other services.
* Making appointments, arranging care.
* Helping someone to wash, dress, bathe or helping someone to eat.
* Or it could be providing much more complex care such as supporting them to record observations such as pulse and blood pressure.

If you do any of these things, then that means you are an unpaid carer.

What is a virtual ward?

Your NHS team feels that the condition of the person who you provide or are planning to provide unpaid help and support to is stable and that they can safely recover and/or be supported to stay in their own home, providing they have the right support and monitoring. The NHS can offer this support and monitoring at home; this is called a **virtual ward.**

The **virtual ward** means that they can stay in the comfort of their own home and have healthcare support. In some virtual wards, healthcare staff will remotely monitor their condition until they get better. They might also provide more intensive support in the home until their condition improves. In Hospital at Home virtual wards, face to face care will also be provided if required. Monitoring their condition means that if they become unwell this will be picked up early and appropriate care delivered. This might mean more intensive care at home, or accessing treatment in hospital quickly if they need it.

With Hospital at Home virtual wards, the person needing care remains under the care of the hospital or community consultant.

**What about sharing information with me?**

 If you are providing unpaid care, then you should be involved in care decisions, where appropriate. This means that your knowledge about the person can contribute to decisions about the care and support being provided by the NHS and social care services.

Your ability to operate any equipment, including both medical monitoring equipment and any technology required to communicate with the clinical teams should also be considered and relevant training provided. You should be provided with access to information about who to contact and what to do if:

* You are no longer able to provide unpaid care on a virtual ward for any reason;
* The condition of the person receiving care has worsened;
* The needs of the person receiving care have increased.

Both your experience and the experience of the person you care for are valued as virtual wards evolve. You should get the opportunity to share your experience if you are willing to provide it.

The patient’s consent will be asked for if they are able to provide it. The person you provide unpaid care for (the patient) will have been given a leaflet about the virtual ward which you might also find helpful. Your needs should also be considered by the virtual ward team, so you feel supported to care.

**What’s in the patient leaflet?**

This tells the person you care for about:

* Any monitoring (tech) devices – what they are and how they work
* Any information that is sent automatically or needs to be sent
* What happens if readings or their condition worsens
* If care or visits are being provided when and how they will be delivered
* Who will contact them if something is not going right
* Who provides support and advice on what to do next
* A contact for the virtual ward

**What about support for you as an unpaid carer?**

If you are likely to be providing unpaid care that affects parts of your life, you may decide that you need more help to:

* **Stay in work** – talk to your employer, you might be able to get flexible working. You can get advice here: <https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/work-and-career>
* **Continue any studies or education** – talk to your college or university – there are some tips here: <https://carers.org/studying-and-training/studying-and-training>
* **Support your wellbeing** – get support from local carers’ support or here: <https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/health>
* **Manage financially** – look at what you might be entitled to here: <https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/financial-support>
* **Support for your wider family** – look at what you might be entitled here: <https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/practical-support>
* **Coordinate care and support** to the person you care for – <https://jointlyapp.com/>
* **Learn about the health and care needs** of the person you care for by asking for appropriate sources of information

Anyone providing unpaid care and support is entitled to a carer’s assessment. A carer’s assessments looks at your needs as an unpaid carers and meeting outcomes that are important to you.

**Where can I find further information?**

More information can be found on local authorities’ websites here:

Go to the **Carers UK (**<https://www.carersuk.org/>) **and Carers Trust (**<https://www.carers.org/>) **websites** for information about support available.

Carers UK also also have an online forum where you can speak to other carers, and a free helpline, open Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm on **0808 808 7777**.

Your local carers’ support can be found here: <https://www.carersuk.org/help-and-advice/get-support/local-support>