

# Who Cares for the Carers?

by Sally Bundock

It is currently estimated that there are almost 6.4 million carers in the UK and that over the next 30 years this number will increase by around 60%. The value of the care currently provided in the UK is around £119 billion per year. Carers are of all ages. Some provide care for a small number of hours each week and might not even consider themselves to be carers whilst others care for 60+ hours per week. People over 50 account for around a half of all carers. At a time when many had hoped to realise their retirement plans caring becomes an issue.

**Caring is something that the majority of us will be involved in during our lives.**



It may be for a short period or for much longer. It may be for a child, partner, parent or more than one person. We may be a carer ourselves or may be aware that a friend or family member is one. Whatever the case it is important to understand what the commitment really means and what financial and personal support is available to make life run as smoothly as possible. Carers support the individuals they care for. Relatives and friends can offer much valued help and friendship to carers.

For someone who is not a carer it may be difficult to appreciate what it involves. In essence the help provided may take many hours each week and could cover anything from shopping to intimate personal care. Caring can be a rich source of satisfaction in people's lives. It can help deepen and strengthen relationships, teach new skills and help an individual realise potential they never thought they had. It can also be very challenging and hence it is important that it is not done alone and that the carer takes advantage of the full range of support available.

Much information is available on the DPW/Directgov websites [www.dwp.gov.uk](http://www.dwp.gov.uk) & [www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk) There are two organisations, however, that every carer should be aware of - the Carers Trust [www.carers.org](http://www.carers.org) (Princess Royal Trust for Carers and Crossroads Care) and Carers UK [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org) Both provide comprehensive information on all aspects of caring, personal support via online community forums and blogs and access to local groups. Support organisations such as the MS Society are also a mine of useful information.

Carers Trust has a nationwide network of 144 Carers Centres. These are independent charities that deliver a wide range of local support services either by telephone, drop-in or outreach surgeries. All provide information and advice, emotional support and have a

unified voice in the locality ensuring an impact on decision-making. Some centres provide additional services such as advocacy and practical help. Carers Trust survey of those attending Carers Centres recorded very high satisfaction levels.

Crossroads Care schemes are a network of 76 local independent charities providing support to carers and people they care for, often through the provision of flexible breaks. Services are provided through a network of local providers across England and Wales each offering a core service where a trained carer support worker comes into the home to take over the caring responsibilities for a short or longer break. Additional services are available in some areas depending on funding.

Carers UK have an excellent freephone Advice Line (0808 808 7777) which in 2011 advised 16,000 carers. Each year they run Carers Rights Day and participate in Carers Week. They have 45 nationwide groups and 500 affiliated groups providing support. Around half of all carers juggle their caring responsibilities with some form of paid work. To help employers support their staff with caring responsibilities Carers UK set up Employers for Carers. 50+ companies belong to this including BT, Sainsbury's and British Gas. Carers UK are active in campaigning to make life better for carers. They strive to improve public understanding

It is essential that carers make every possible effort to look after their own health as well as that of the person/s they are caring for. A good first step is to register their situation with their GP. An annual check up on all aspects of emotional and physical health is recommended.

Self care is a priority. This is especially important in the 60-69 age group when many individuals have the extra pressures of caring for more than one person and also trying to continue working. An excellent tool for emotional wellbeing is to talk. Talk to a GP, friends or join a local carers group.

income, pensions and the possibility of getting into debt. A carer can be credited with NI contributions whilst caring to help accrue contributions for a state pension but this needs to be requested from DWP. It is always advisable to try to find a solution before giving up work.

Carers have a right to a Carer's Assessment if they provide 'substantial' care on a regular basis. Even if the person being cared for refuses help and will not accept a Community Care Assessment (also known as a Needs Assessment), the carer still has the right to an assessment in their own right. The assessment is carried out by the Social Services Department of the local council/trust and it will look at the full impact caring has on the carer's life including health, work and relationships.

If a Community Care Assessment has been carried out the assessment of needs will be looked at together with this to formulate an appropriate Care Plan. If the outcome is that services should be provided then a Personal Budget is drawn up and there is the right to ask for a Direct Payment instead of having the service arranged by Social Services. This facilitates greater flexibility and choice. The help provided for a carer will similarly be allocated and a direct payment may, for example, be used to provide a short holiday break or leisure classes to relieve stress.

Every carer who has an assessment should be asked about how emergencies should be handled if they are unable to undertake their caring role. In some areas a Carer Card Scheme operates. The carer registers their emergency plan with the

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Good GPs are flexible about arranging consultations and home visits. If lifting is a part of daily life it is essential that great care is taken of the back and this may need to be discussed with the GP. A GP can also provide useful information on local carers and support groups.

Without doubt caring can be stressful and the wise carer will work to find ways to relax and handle difficult situations. Breaks in terms of an evening out, a few hours a week or a longer break are essential for physical and mental wellbeing and these must be a priority. Crossroads and the local council are amongst organisations able to help. Many carers are not in full health themselves but it is essential that medical appointments, flu vaccinations or treatment are not neglected.

Carers have a small but growing number of legal rights. Unfortunately many carers do not know about them or how to get help and every year millions of £s of carers' benefits are unclaimed. Around £843 million of Carer's Allowance is unclaimed each year. It is important to be aware of the right to financial help.

In the workplace carers have certain rights. There is the right to request flexible working and to take 'reasonable' time off work for dealing with dependant emergencies. Coping with caring and working can be very difficult and an individual has to decide when and how to discuss with colleagues/ management. A decision to give up work must be very carefully considered as there are huge financial implications with respect to

social services and they then carry a numbered card. One phone call quoting the number activates the plan. Even if a carer's area does not have one of these schemes it is advisable to draw up their own emergency plan. In addition it is important to ensure that carers are fully involved in decisions relating to patient discharge and aftercare following any hospitalisation of those they care for.

The aim of the Community Care Assessment is to look at the help needed by the person being cared for. Help may be needed because of a disability, health condition or frailty due to advanced years. A social worker will visit the person's home and look at personal care needs and their thoughts on how care should be provided. All relevant issues will be considered as will the carer's views. Examples of services that might be offered are equipment such as a hoist or grab rail, a temporary stay in respite care or a care worker to provide personal home care. Each case is looked at on its own merits and in line with the local area's guidance rules. Finally a Care Plan is drawn up. There may be a financial charge for services and this will depend on the individual's savings and income.

Decisions made on Carer's Assessments and Community Care Assessments can be challenged. It is important to get good advice from the Citizens Advice Bureau or similar in these circumstances.

The main benefit for carers is Carer's Allowance. Whether an individual can claim it depends on a number of factors. There are other benefits also paid through Income Support and Pension Credit - the Carer Premium and the Carer Addition.

**A claim for Carer's Allowance may be made by calling the Benefit Enquiry Line - Freephone: 0800 882 200 Textphone: 0800 243 355 or visiting the Directgov website.**

An individual may also be able to apply for other financial help including help with health and/or heating costs. During 2013 the launch of Universal Credit will see a number of changes in how benefits to carers are allocated and delivered.



It is important that the person being cared for is claiming everything they are entitled to. The two main disability benefits are Disability Living Allowance (DLA) and Attendance Allowance. Working age people who are receiving DLA will, over time, be invited to claim the new Personal Independence Payment (PIP).

The benefits system is very complicated and finding out what one is entitled to can be difficult. The best way to start is to get advice, for example from the Carers UK Adviceline. If individuals are not happy with decisions made again there are appeals procedures.

Good additional sources of financial support and advice are the 3000+ UK benevolent funds/charitable trusts - visit [www.turn2us.org.uk](http://www.turn2us.org.uk) to assess possible benefits and grants. The government's current welfare reform initiative will affect carers in a number of ways. It will take some time for the full effects of the welfare changes to become clear. In the meantime carer support organisations continue to press for better support for carers.

**Caring is undoubtedly a challenge but many consider it worthwhile. There will always be great concerns about the future and how life may be after caring. The important thing to remember is to access all the help that is available and put plans in place to ensure personal wellbeing is not neglected.**

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