

Case study 4: SDO/15 Arksey

Patient- and carer-centred services: Carers

Services to support carers of people with mental health problems

Description of the research

This review of research evidence and service provision regarding support for carers of people with mental health problems consisted of a literature review and a consultation. Most of the identified studies focused on the effectiveness of specific interventions and did not account for the wider circumstances affecting people's lives. However, a consensus view emerged from the consultation that effective services should be based on the following principles: positive and inclusive; flexible and individualised; accessible and responsive; and integrated and coordinated. This review led the SDO Programme to commission a series of studies to clarify key issues for carers of people with mental health problems (measurement of outcomes for carers, respite care for carers of people with dementia, carers' assessments, and sharing information between carers and professionals).

Research impact and utilisation

This research has influenced several national policy documents, including a Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) position paper on developing social care and the Equality and Human Rights Strategy & Action Plan (Access to Health and Social Services) in

Northern Ireland (see [Table 8](#), page 35). It has also influenced national guidance on service delivery. Guidance on developing carer support services (Department of Health, 2002a), which is aimed at local health and social care commissioners of mental health services, refers to the study, stating that:

"... studies [have] been able to identify some positive outcomes for carers and service users when carer support services are provided, and this work has informed this guidance."

The guidance draws directly on findings from the study, for example:

"The consensus view from carers themselves is that carer support workers will be more effectively managed by an organisation that is seen as being independent of the statutory services."

The PI is also advising a collaborative project between the University of Wales, Bangor and Crossroads Wales, which is investigating the needs and support for carers of people with mental health problems across Wales with a view to developing a new service (correspondence from PI, 7 July 2006).

The researchers have also contributed to methodological debates. Two papers have been published on the methods used in the scoping study (one peer-reviewed journal article [see [Table 6](#), page 29] and a Social Policy Research Unit briefing, published by the University of York), and these have influenced other researchers' methodology. For example, researchers used the 'six part framework' method in a review of services for people with early-onset dementia for the Scottish Executive. The researchers also involved service users and carers as a result of the methods used by Arksey *et al.*, noting that it: *"was a useful exercise which identified some new research"* (Stalker, 2006).

Similarly, a review of social care developments *"drew on other recent systematic literature reviews in the field"* (Knapp, 2004).

*"the [methodological] approach of Arksey *et al.* in their 2002 review for the NHS Service Delivery and Organisation Programme was adopted."*

Bradshaw, 2004
