

Committee Inquiry: Health and Social Care Workforce Planning

Evidence from Carers Wales

Introduction - About Carers Wales

Carers Wales is the voice of carers and works to improve carers' lives.

Carers provide unpaid care by looking after an ill, frail or disabled family member, friend or partner.

Carers give so much to society yet as a consequence of caring, they experience ill health, poverty and discrimination.

Carers Wales is an organisation of carers fighting to end this injustice. We will not stop until people recognise the true value of carers' contribution to society and carers get the practical, financial and emotional support they need.

Remit of our evidence

We will provide evidence and comment only on part of the inquiry, namely whether social care workforce planning is undertaken with sufficient regard for future patterns of demand for services and whether the information available to workforce planners is of sufficient quantity and quality to ensure effective planning.

Future patterns of demand

Although the main focus of the committee's inquiry is on the paid workforce in social care, Carers Wales feels strongly that the crucial role of the 350,000+ unpaid family carers in Wales needs to be recognised. The impact that projected changes to this unpaid workforce will have on the patterns of service demand and on effective workforce planning needs to be built in to all planning assumptions.

Family carers currently provide at least 70% of community care (Fulfilled Lives, Supportive Communities - WAG 2006). We believe workforce planners cannot assume that families will be able to continue to provide the same level of care in the future. This is not due to any radical change in the desire of carers to support the people they love and look after. Rather it reflects a whole range of economic, social and demographic factors that will make it increasingly difficult for carers to provide the same levels of care as at present. Even a small reduction in the level of support provided by unpaid carers will have a major impact on the demand for services and on workforce planning.

The projected demographic changes over the next thirty years indicate that there will be more people living longer but that many will need higher levels of

care for longer periods. At the same time there will be significantly fewer people aged 45 – 64. Currently the majority of carers are in this age group.

Research indicates that in thirty years time, the UK will need 9 million carers in the UK to support people with long term needs at similar levels as at present. This is a substantial increase compared to the 6 million carers recorded in the Census 2001. (It Could Be You – a report on the chances of becoming a carer. Carers UK 2001)

The structures of families and society have changed and are extremely unlikely to revert to the pattern of close-knit communities with extended families living in close geographical proximity that make caring easier. There are more single person households, more families where both adults are in paid employment and many people live at a distance from the relatives and friends who need their support. These patterns are likely to continue. As a result, not all of the additional 3 million family carers that are needed will be able to provide the high levels of care required and this will increase the demands on paid care services. Even in the shorter term, this is a growing trend as more carers struggle to maintain a life on their own, including paid employment.

Carers Wales believes it is essential that :

a) detailed modelling is undertaken to look at the impact of possible changes on the ability or willingness of family carers to continue to provide the great majority of long term care will have on the planning for the paid social workforce in Wales.

b) investment is made in providing appropriate support for carers to enable them to continue to care but without experiencing serious discrimination and inequality in terms of employment, their own health and well-being, enjoyment of family life and the right to a life of their own.

c) the 2011 Census retains a question on caring otherwise the information available to workforce planners will not be of sufficient quantity and quality to ensure effective planning.

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