



MPs and staffers' guide to mental health

Where to go
and what to do



All Party Parliamentary Group on Mental Health

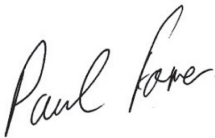
Foreword:

Why we have produced this booklet

MPs and their staff often come into contact with constituents in distress, sometimes through surgeries, emails and telephone calls. Currently they receive no information or advice on how to deal with these situations appropriately.

One in four people will experience a mental health problem in any one year. Many social conditions can be affected by, or in themselves affect, a person's mental health. Worries over other issues, such as long term illness, housing problems, or social deprivation and benefits, can make people anxious, or exacerbate mental health problems.

This booklet provides practical tips and advice on how to support constituents and where to signpost them. If you would like more information, you can visit our organisations' websites – which can be found in the 'signposting' chapter – or you can contact us directly.



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Quick-reference guide

The below information is a quick-reference guide to what you need to know at a glance. More information is found in the following chapters.

Setting boundaries:

- Agree your remit between MPs and Staff: what you can help constituents with, what you cannot, and what to do next.
- You are not expected to diagnose or resolve a constituent's mental health problems, or provide psychological support to someone in distress. The best thing you can do is to listen and signpost them to more appropriate services.
- Agree an office procedure for handling challenging encounters.
- Do not disclose a person's mental health problem to others without their permission.

Helping constituents in distress:

- Acknowledge how the person is feeling.
- Listen sensitively.
- Use open questions: How, what, when, where, who, why.
- Use a reassuring tone and display responsive body language.
- Avoid focussing on negative options or language.
- 'Reflect back' information.

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- Don't be afraid to say 'no'.
 - Acknowledge a person's anger even if unfairly directed at you.
 - Present any advice you give as a series of options. Introduce signposting to allow constituents to make their own choices.

Helping confused constituents or people who lack focus:

If a constituent seems to have difficulty in articulating themselves or focussing, you can try to help them be clearer:

- **Be proactive:** listen for a few minutes, and then do your best to bring them to the point: "So what is it that you would like help with today?"
- **Seek clarification:** it is reasonable to say "You're giving me a lot of information, but before you go on I need to know now what exactly it is that you want my help with."
- **Summarise the issues:** this shows you have listened and also helps to focus the conversation.
- **Highlight any underlying issues:** it might be that there is a key issue that needs to be dealt with before all of the other issues can be addressed.
- **If the main issue is still unclear:** ask the person to write down their concerns in bullet point form and contact you once they have written them down. Perhaps consider drafting some clear bullet points together if the person has difficulty in writing.

An overview of mental health

We all have mental health, just as we all have physical health. It exists on a spectrum and people can move up and down from good to poor for any number of reasons. Every year, one in four people will experience a mental health problem.

The most common mental health problems include:

Anxiety disorders

Anxiety is a normal human feeling we all experience when faced with threatening or difficult situations. But if these feelings become persistent or overwhelming, they can stop people from doing everyday things. Anxiety disorders include:

- **Panic attacks** – sudden, unpredictable and intense attacks of anxiety and terror of imminent disaster.
- **Phobias** – extreme fear of something which most people do not find dangerous or troublesome.
- **Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)** – stressful thoughts (obsessions), and powerful urges to perform repetitive acts, such as repeating a specific phrase to prevent harm coming to a loved one (compulsion).
- **Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)** – can occur after a traumatic experience or event. PTSD symptoms can include intense distress, feeling easily upset, experiencing a lack of concentration, and can involve reliving aspects of the trauma through vivid flashbacks, intrusive thoughts or nightmares.
- **Generalised Anxiety Disorder (GAD)** – a persistent and prolonged state of worry or anxiety which can involve racing thoughts or a lack of concentration.

Mood disorders

Also known as affective disorders. People experience mood changes or disturbances, generally involving either mania (elation) or depression. Mood disorders include:

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- **Depression** – involves mild to severe symptoms involving a depressed mood such as despondency, loss of enjoyment, or poor motivation. 1 in 5 people will experience it in their lives. This may interfere with someone’s life. These feelings tend not to go away after a couple of weeks, or they come back for a few days or weeks at a time. Depression can stop people living the way they want to, and severe depression is linked with a risk of suicide.
 - **Bipolar disorder** – once known as manic depression, this involves extreme swings in mood – from periods of overactive, excited behaviour – known as ‘mania’ – to deep depression. Between these severe highs and lows, there may be stable times. There are different types of bipolar disorder which all affect mood states.

Psychotic disorders

Psychosis is when someone directly perceives or interprets events differently from people around them. Symptoms can vary from person to person and may change over time. They can include difficulty concentrating, anxiety, irritability, and sleeplessness.

Two of the most common symptoms of psychosis are hallucinations (when you hear, smell, feel or see something other people can’t) and delusions (beliefs held despite strong contrary evidence). Psychotic disorders include:

- **Schizophrenia** – schizophrenia is often misunderstood and stigmatized. Schizophrenia is a diagnosis which may be given to someone if they experience some of the following symptoms, for example difficulty concentrating, becoming withdrawn, lose interest in things, hearing voices or experiencing hallucinations. For some people these experiences or beliefs can start happening quite suddenly, but for others they can occur more gradually.
- **Schizoaffective disorder** – people diagnosed with schizoaffective disorders have a combination of symptoms similar to schizophrenia and bipolar disorder.

Eating problems

Eating problems are characterised by difficult relationships with food and eating. They include potentially harmful behaviours, such as excessive

exercise, or eating large amounts at once. Eating problems can affect anyone, regardless of background. Because eating problems are often associated with young women, it can be harder for men and older people to seek help.

Eating disorders can have a number of causes, for example, difficult life experiences, physical and mental health problems, family issues or social pressure.

- **Anorexia Nervosa** – involves strictly controlling eating habits characterised by not eating or eating very little. Anorexia can affect every aspect of someone’s life and can be a life threatening illness.
- **Bulimia** – is more common than anorexia. It is a cycle of feeling compelled to eat large amounts of food, and then trying to undo the effects of doing so.
- **Compulsive eating** – people may have come to rely on food for emotional support to mask other problems in their life.
- **Binge eating** – is often triggered by serious upset and involves eating very large quantities of (often) high-calorie food, all in one go.

Personality disorders

Personality disorders are often misunderstood and can result in people feeling stigmatised. Our personality is central to our understanding of who we are. Being told it is ‘disordered’ can be very upsetting and feel undermining. Someone who has a personality disorder may find their patterns of thinking, feeling and behaving are more difficult to manage. They may experience a more limited range of emotions, attitudes and behaviours with which to cope with everyday life.

Personality disorder can show itself in different ways. Psychiatrists in the UK tend to use a system which identifies different types of personality disorder, which can be grouped into three categories:

- **Suspicious:** paranoid, schizoid, schizotypal, antisocial.
- **Emotional and impulsive:** borderline, histrionic, narcissistic.
- **Anxious:** avoidant, dependent, obsessive compulsive.

How much help should you give?

Rather than trying to diagnose or resolve a constituent's mental health problems, the best way of supporting someone is to listen sensitively and signpost them to more appropriate sources of help.

To do this effectively it may help to know about:

- **Setting boundaries** – to ensure you look after yourself emotionally and do not devote too much time to one person.
- **Establishing supportive office practices** – to support yourself and your colleagues.
- **Suggesting that your constituent seeks help** – depending on a constituent's individual needs.
- **Confidentiality and data protection** – how to comply with these requirements.

Guidance on talking to someone in distress can be found in the next chapter.

Setting boundaries and building confidence

It is important to establish boundaries with your constituent early on so that they know what you can and can't do. This will help avoid situations where your constituent becomes overly dependent on you. Dependent relationships will not help you or the constituent in the long run.

Having clear boundaries will also help build your confidence to help people.

You could set out:

- How much time you will be able to provide.
- How regularly a constituent should contact you, and how.
- Which problems you will be able help them with and what you can't.

Establishing supportive office practices

It is important to consider the impact of these encounters on your own health and the health of your colleagues. A small amount of preliminary work can help create a supportive working atmosphere. As soon as you can, take some time to establish the following in your office:

- **An 'easy reference' job description** – MPs and staff should agree on what you can and can't help constituents with. You can write this down and refer to it if you are asked to do things that are outside your remit.
- **A procedure for handling challenging encounters** – the next section has guidance you can use to draw up an office procedure for staff to follow. This could include when MPs should intervene in challenging encounters.
- **An agreement to discuss challenging encounters** – debrief with colleagues. Seek reassurance and feedback about the approach you took and the guidance you gave, or provide such reassurance and feedback to your colleagues.
- **A log of repeat correspondence** – your colleagues can refer to this to know what has been said before and by whom.
- **Professional contacts in mental health** – familiarise yourself with the local contacts suggested in the signposting chapter of this booklet. Establish contact with your local Community Mental Health Team or Mental Health Trust. They should be available to give information and guidance when you feel a constituent needs more specialist help.

Suggesting that a constituent seeks help with their mental health

It can be hard to know whether you should suggest that your constituent seeks professional help for their mental health. Not everyone in distress will have a mental health problem, so signposting to medical help may not always be appropriate.

There is no hard and fast rule for when you should bring up mental health services. If you do decide to, think about the language you use – it is important to act with sensitivity and respect. For example, suggesting that somebody “has a lot to cope with and might benefit from talking to somebody about it” is different to directly suggesting that the person has a mental health problem.

Confidentiality and data protection

MPs and staff must comply with the requirements of the Data Protection Act (DPA) 1998 when completing casework on behalf of a constituent. There is helpful guidance provided for MPs and political parties on this by the Information Commissioner’s Office and the House of Commons, which can be found at www.parliament.uk/documents/upload/advice-for-members-offices.pdf. Specific guidance for helping constituents who may be at risk of self harm or suicide can be found in the next chapter.

Information about a constituent’s mental health is sensitive personal data. A person’s consent is needed before an MP can disclose or pass this information on to anyone else. Sometimes consent is implied when a constituent contacts you and makes it clear that they want you to use information about their mental health to assist them with the issue they are asking you to help with in your casework. Here are some good practice points:

- Always clarify with your constituent what information is to be disclosed and what action you will take on their behalf.
- Always clarify what it is you are being requested to do.

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- Only disclose information about mental health to the extent that it is strictly relevant and necessary to deal with the specific issue you are being asked to help with.
 - Where possible get written consent for disclosure and for your action plan. If there is no time to get written consent, you should seek verbal consent and make a note of it.

In some circumstances if you can convey information about someone's mental health to a third party; where it relates to the prevention or detection of a crime, the prosecution of an offender or the assessment or collection of taxes. In these circumstances the relevant information should be passed to the police.

A constituent could contact you about someone else's mental health problems, such as a friend or family member. You should try to find out what it is that the third party wants and whether they give consent to you taking up their case.

Establishing good practice can help clarify when you are able to disclose information about someone's mental health. If you are unsure about how to proceed, you should seek legal advice.

How to help someone in distress

Most MPs and their staff will come into contact with constituents in distress. Whether this is face-to-face, over the phone, on social media or via written contact in letters or email, the basic rules for helping someone are the same:

- **Offer a menu of potential options rather than a command.**
- **Avoid focussing on negative options or language.**
- **Be realistic about what you can do** – as set out in the previous chapter.
- **Don't be afraid to say no** – you can manage people's expectations in an empathetic way which does not involve you taking on their situation.
- **Acknowledge a person's anger rather than trying to defend yourself** – even if the anger is directed at you or your actions.

Tone and language

How you speak to someone in distress may have an effect on how they feel. You should consider how the other person will interpret the way you interact with them. It may be helpful to use the following techniques to ensure you appear empathetic and interested:

- **Use a reassuring tone and display responsive body language** – retain eye contact, nod and use utterances to show understanding.
- **Listen sensitively** – allow the person to talk freely and don't interrupt. If they cry or break down, let them express their feelings without rushing:
 - *“Take your time; it must be difficult for you to cope with everything at the moment.”*

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- **Acknowledge how the person is feeling** – but use statements that are neutral or supportive:
 - *“I am very sorry that you have experienced this...”*
 - *“This sounds like an upsetting/a frustrating situation for you...”*
 - *“You must be having a difficult time.”*
 - **Validate and assure** – help the person to feel hope and optimism. You can tell them that many people also have similar experiences. If they have told you about a specific mental health problem you could say:
 - *“Lots of people experience mental health problems.”*
 - *“There are different treatments available which people find helpful.”*
 - **Avoid statements** that may appear to belittle someone’s feelings, like:
 - *“You’ll feel better tomorrow.”*
 - *“Don’t worry about it.”*
 - **Reflect back and introduce signposting** – after listening, introduce a positive note:
 - *“I appreciate it helps to talk about the situation. I can help you with X, but I am not able to help you with Y. However, I can suggest some options for where you might be able to find further help with Y, if you would like.”*

What can I do if someone is experiencing a crisis?

Social media gives people direct access to MPs in a way they’ve never had before. Think about how you and your team may respond if someone contacts you in distress via social media, for example:

Q: @MP I’ve been feeling awful and the only way I can cope is self-harm.

A: @constituent It sounds like you’re having a difficult time. If you’d like to talk to someone, the Samaritans on 116 123 is open 24/7. Please take care.

Q: @MP I can't cope any more. My life is pointless. When my husband goes to work I am going to end it all.

A: @constituent I'm very worried about you. The Samaritans listen 24/7 on 116 123. For urgent help call 999 or visit A&E. Please take care.

If you think a constituent you are in contact with, either by telephone or face to face, is experiencing an acute mental health crisis, or expressing suicidal thoughts or feelings, there are several things that you could do:

- **Try to appear calm**, even though this can be hard to do.
- **Ask the person** if there is anyone they would like you to contact on their behalf. This could be a carer, friend or family member or their healthcare professional.
- **Suggest** that the person contacts their GP or their Care Coordinator (if they have one) directly.
- **Suggest** the person contacts their local Crisis Team.
- You could suggest the person goes to **the local walk-in or crisis centre**, or if this is not possible, a nearby Accident and Emergency department. In some areas people can go direct to crisis houses, but it is worth checking beforehand that they accept self-referrals in your area before you send someone there.
- Suggest the person contacts a **listening service** such as the Samaritans: 08457 90 90 90.

What should I do if there is a risk of harm?

If you are seriously concerned that someone is at risk of harming themselves, you or others, you should contact the emergency services by dialling 999.

You should explain to the operator that you are concerned about someone's mental health and their safety or the safety of others. The 999 operator may request that an ambulance is dispatched. The police may attend.

Sometimes contacting the emergency services can lead to a person being detained under sections of the Mental Health Act. This should not prevent you from taking action, but you may want to read more about what this means for the person involved. More information can be found in the glossary.

What should I do if the person becomes angry or abusive?

Though it is rare, very occasionally people may become aggressive or threatening. In this case your first concern should always be your personal safety.

- Acknowledge the anger rather than trying to defend yourself, even if the anger is directed at you or your actions.
- If someone becomes offensive or abusive, politely but assertively interrupt them to state that you find the language or tone unacceptable and request that they moderate it.
- Ensure that you give them a chance to stop being abusive or offensive so that the conversation can continue.
- If they are unwilling or unable to stop being offensive or abusive then explain the extent of your ability to help them. Explain that they are welcome to ring/come back with a relevant query as long as they are not offensive.
- State that you are going to terminate the call and hang up, or ask the person to leave the premises.
- If you feel you are in danger, follow your office guidelines and if necessary call the police.

After the event, make sure you log instances of angry or abusive behaviour and seek support and advice from your colleagues on appropriate next steps. An established contact at the local Mental Health Trust can often be a good source of support.

Handling challenging emails and phone calls

Repeat contact from constituents can sometimes be a challenge. These tips can help you address challenging contact in an assertive manner, with a view to bringing it to a close:

- **Remain calm and assertive but not aggressive in your responses.**
- **Recap any previous contact registered in the contact log; what they have needed and what you have helped them with in the past.**
- **Ask if there is anything else you can help them with.**
- **Refer to your job role if you cannot help with something.**
- **Offer other sources of help if appropriate and available.**
- **If necessary, be firm and straightforward and ask them not to send further emails or make phone calls.**
- **If you have made this request you could screen callers' numbers emails and refrain from answering/responding.**

Signposting and local information

Below is a list of the core providers of mental health care services with a summary of what they do. You should take the time to find out who provides these services in your area and how they can help.

Having telephone numbers and addresses to hand will aid staff when helping a constituent, particularly in stressful situations.

Help in your community

Local Doctors' Surgeries are often the first point of contact for someone with likely mental health problems. Diagnosis by a GP can often help people access specialised treatment and advice.

This link will help you find the nearest practice or surgery to your constituent:
www.nhs.uk/servicedirectories/Pages/ServiceSearch.aspx

In addition, a trusted local GP surgery may also be able to offer you advice about mental health over the phone:

Contact:

Position:

Address:

Tel No:

Email:

Hours of operation:

Community Mental Health Teams (CMHTs) provide community based services to people aged above 16 who are experiencing mental health issues. CMHTs are multi-agency teams consisting of different mental health professionals, such as community mental health nurses, social workers, occupational therapists, support time recovery workers, psychiatrists and psychologists.

To find your nearest team you can use the NHS choices Find Service:
www.nhs.uk/service directories/pages/service search.aspx

Contact:

Position:

Address:

Tel No:

Email:

Hours of operation:

Crisis Services

There should be a crisis team in your area and there may be a crisis house. In some areas people can go to these services directly – in others a medical referral is needed. Find out from your local CMHT what the system is in your area and record it here. It will not help someone to send them on to a service that cannot help them directly.

Contact:

Position:

Address:

Tel No:

Email:

Hours of operation:

Local charities and organisations

Mind is a national mental health charity that campaigns for people’s rights and informs and supports thousands of people on a daily basis. Mind has a network of over 160 local Minds offering 1,600 services around the country, including supported housing, crisis helplines, counselling, befriending, advocacy, and employment and training schemes. You can find your nearest local Mind – www.mind.org.uk/help/mind_in_your_area

Contact:

Position:

Address:

Tel No:

Email:

Hours of operation:

Rethink Mental Illness is a charity that believes a better life is possible for millions of people affected by mental illness. For 40 years it has brought people together to support each other. It runs services and support groups across England that change people’s lives and challenges attitudes about mental illness. This link will show you your nearest Rethink Mental Illness services – www.rethink.org/services-groups

Contact:

Position:

Address:

Tel No:

Email:

Hours of operation:

The Royal College of Psychiatrists is the main professional body for psychiatrists in the UK. It has a wide range of evidence-based information leaflets on common mental health problems and treatments. Selected leaflets have also been translated into over 20 different languages, as well as British Sign Language – www.rcpsych.ac.uk

Samaritans provide support by telephone, email, letter and face-to-face. The voluntary support is offered to those having relationship and family problems, those dealing with loss, financial worries, job-related stress, college or study related stress and body image issues. Your nearest branch can be found here – www.samaritans.org/branches

Contact:

Position:

Address:

Tel No:

Email:

Hours of operation:

Citizens Advice Bureau (CABs) can provide support for many of the difficulties that can often be associated with a mental health problem, such as housing worries, financial problems, issues with benefits and employment issues. Services provided by CABs can vary, so it's best to record what your local branch offers. The nearest citizens advice can be found on their homepage at – www.citizensadvice.org.uk

Contact:

Position:

Address:

Tel No:

Email:

Key services provided:

Hours of operation:

MindEd is a free educational resource on children and young people's mental health for all adults. MindEd is suitable for all adults working with, or caring for, infants, children or teenagers; all the information provided is quality assured by experts, useful, and easy to understand – www.minded.org.uk

Helplines

Mind infoline: 0300 123 3393 or email info@mind.org.uk, Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm. Provides information on types of mental distress, where to get help, information about drugs and alternative treatments and advocacy.

Mind legal advice service: 0300 466 6463. Provides legal information and general advice on mental health related law covering:

- mental health
- mental capacity
- community care
- human rights and discrimination/equality related to mental health issues

Mental Health Helplines Partnership www.mhhp.org.uk is the umbrella body for organisations offering helpline services to people with mental health needs. You can use their website to search for helpline services in your area.

Rethink Mental Illness: 0300 5000 927, Monday to Friday 9.30am to 4pm provides information on mental health conditions such as depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and personality disorder, as well as practical information on benefits, getting access to services, medication and psychological therapy. Specialist advisers are also available Monday to Friday, 10am to 2pm. Advice is available by email at advice@rethink.org.

SANE: 0300 304 7000, daily from 6pm to 11pm. Provides a national, out-of-hours helpline offering specialist emotional support and information to anyone affected by mental illness, including family, friends and carers.

Samaritans: 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org, 24 hours a day. The service is available 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing feelings of distress or despair, including those which may lead to suicide.

Other useful numbers

E.g. local advocacy services, local authority housing services, Job Centre Plus.

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Glossary of mental health terms

Advocate – an advocate is a person who can make sure someone’s voice is heard in times of need. Having an advocate can be helpful in situations where someone is finding it difficult to make their views known, or to make people listen to them and take them into account.

Advocacy – process of supporting and enabling people to express their views and concerns, access information and services; defend and promote their rights and responsibilities and explore choices and options. Some people are entitled to the help of an Independent Mental Health Advocate – see *IMHA*.

Aftercare Services – for patients who have been detained because of their mental health and for those on community treatment orders. Everyone with mental health needs is entitled to a community care assessment to establish what services they might need. Section 117 of the Mental Health Act imposes a duty on health and social services to provide aftercare services free of charge to certain patients who have been detained under the Act.

Antidepressants – medicines sometimes used in the treatment of depression, anxiety, obsessional problems and sometimes pain.

Antipsychotics – medicines used for the treatment of psychosis.

Befriending Schemes – provide friendship and support to people with a mental illness.

Care Coordinator – the main point of contact and support for someone who has a need for ongoing mental health care. They keep in close contact when someone receives mental health care and monitor how that care is delivered – particularly outside of hospital. They are also responsible for assessing someone’s health and social care needs under the care programme approach (CPA). A care coordinator could be any mental health professional, for example nurse, social worker or other mental health worker – whoever is thought appropriate for the person’s situation.

Community Mental Health Team (CMHT) – supports people with mental health problems in the community. CMHT members include community psychiatric nurses (CPNs), social workers, psychologists, occupational therapists, psychiatrists and support workers.

Community Psychiatric Nurse (CPN) – nurse who specialises in mental health, and can assess and treat people with mental health problems.

Counsellor – someone who uses counselling to help with people’s problems, plan for the future and work through their feelings.

Clinical Psychologist – a psychologist who has undergone specialist training in the treatment of people with mental health problems.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) – talking treatment that emphasises the important role of thinking in how we feel and what we do. The treatment involves identifying how negative thoughts affect us and then looks at ways of tackling or challenging those thoughts.

Crisis House – Crisis houses offer intensive short-term support, allowing people to resolve their crisis in a residential (rather than hospital) setting. CMHT, Crisis Resolution and Home Treatment teams make referrals. Some crisis houses – particularly those set up by the voluntary sector – allow people to self-refer.

Crisis Services – mental health crises include suicidal behaviour or intention, panic attacks, psychotic episodes or other behaviour that seems out of control or irrational and that is likely to endanger oneself or others. Many of the crisis services provided by the NHS and local social services are designed to respond to these types of acute situations or illnesses.

Crisis Team/Crisis Intervention Team – mental health professionals whose job is to work with people with mental illness who are experiencing a crisis. The aim of the team is to bring about a rapid resolution of the problem and prevent admission to hospital.

Crisis Resolution and Home Treatment (CRHT) Team – consists of mental health professionals with the aim of providing people with the most suitable, helpful and least restrictive treatment possible, in order to prevent or shorten hospital stays.

General Practitioner (GP) – the first point of contact with the NHS for most people. If more specialised treatment is needed, a GP can make a referral to secondary mental health services such as psychiatrists, inpatient hospital care or community mental health services.

Guardianship – this is where someone called a ‘guardian’ is appointed to help someone live as independently as possible in the community, instead of being sectioned and kept in hospital. A person would be placed under guardianship if someone’s mental health problem meant that it would be difficult for them to avoid danger or being taken advantage of. A guardian has the power to make certain decisions and to make conditions that the person would be asked to keep to.

Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) – Improving Access to Psychological Therapies is an NHS programme offering psychological interventions for treating people with depression and anxiety disorders.

Independent Mental Health Advocates (IMHA) – an advocate specially trained to help people find out their rights under the Mental Health Act 1983 and help someone if they are detained. They can listen to what a person wants and speak for them.

Independent Mental Capacity Advocate (IMCA) – a specially trained advocate who can help someone who does not have the capacity to make particular decisions. NHS bodies or local authorities must take an IMCA’s views into account when making decisions that affect someone who has lost capacity. They are normally appointed by the local authority in England, and by local Health Boards or other NHS bodies in Wales. They must be independent people of integrity and good character with appropriate experience and training.

Mental Capacity – the ability to understand information and make decisions and the ability to communicate decisions. If someone does not understand the information and is unable to make a decision about their care, for example, they are said to lack capacity. *See also the Mental Capacity Act (2005).*

Mental Capacity Act (2005) – the Act provides a legal framework for making decisions in the best interests of people who lack capacity to make a particular decision at a particular time. This could include managing finances, deciding where to live or what treatment to receive.

Mental Health Act (1983) – this is a law that applies to England and Wales which allows people to be detained in hospital against their will (sectioned) if they have a mental illness and pose a risk to themselves or others.

Psychiatrist – a medically trained doctor who specialises in mental health problems and is trained to deal with the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders and can prescribe medication.

Psychologist – a professional who is interested in how people think, how they act, react, interact and behave.

Sectioned – being sectioned means that you are kept in hospital under the Mental Health Act 1983. A person can be sectioned if their own health or safety are at risk, or to protect other people. There are different types of sections, each with different rules to keep someone in hospital. How long a person would have to stay in hospital depends on which section they are kept in hospital under. A person doesn't have to be sectioned to get treatment in hospital – someone can go to hospital the normal way and be a voluntary or informal patient.

Self-referral – allows individuals to refer themselves to services without the need of referral by GP, CMHT or other.

Service User – a term sometimes used to describe someone who uses or has used health services because of mental illness or a disability. 'Person who uses services' is a preferable term as it does not define the person by the services they use.



All Party Parliamentary Group on Mental Health

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