Update on UK Activity on Short Break Research

Short Breaks for Carers: A Scoping Review

Shared Care Scotland commissioned a Scoping Review to better understand what research evidence tells us about the impact of short breaks for carers. This work was completed by researchers at Bangor University. The initial literature search included a broad range of carer groups. Due to the large volume of literature identified, the focus was refined to carers for older people, including people living with dementia. Some key findings are shared below.

- Various types of short breaks are described in the literature, including traditional day-care, residential care and in-home respite, along with innovative breaks provided by host family support arrangements, supported holidays and access to leisure facilities. Most studies evaluating the impact of short breaks focus on day and residential respite care services rather than the alternative types of support that have developed in recent years.

- Short breaks are essential to supporting wellbeing outcomes. Often, they lead to improvements in carer emotional wellbeing and an enhanced sense of resilience, albeit tempered by feelings of guilt. Negative effects can be mitigated when carers are supported to accept their need for a short break as legitimate. Thinking and relating to others in ways not linked to the caring role affords carers space to temporarily disconnect from being a carer, focus on other roles, for example, as a grandmother or a friend, and re-connect with other people. The ways carers use their short break time is important - satisfactory use of time pursing interests or being with friends is associated with positive outcomes and improved wellbeing.

- Short breaks support positive caring relationships. Affording much needed space, they enable carers to positively frame their relationship with the supported person, their caring role and their achievements. There is limited research looking at the ways short breaks impact on carer choices, including limits to the caring role. Whilst some studies suggest that they play a key role in supporting continued caring and delaying admission to a care home there is too little research to draw firm conclusions.

There remain significant gaps in our knowledge about the impact of innovative short breaks that move away from traditional service models. This is a key area for future research development.

Findings from this Scoping Review shall support the work of a UK Research and Practice Development Group on Short Breaks for Carers. Members of the Group shall disseminate the findings at a number of events, including the UK Dementia Congress 2019 and the
Wales Carers Officers Learning and Improvement Network Meeting 2019. Further knowledge exchange events are planned for 2020.

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New research on short breaks

Co-creating, commissioning and delivering meaningful short breaks: Integrating research, policy and practice


This research aims to provide robust evidence that informs the development, commissioning and delivery of innovative short breaks provision for spousal caring dyads (aged 65+) where one member is living with dementia. Seeking to understand what matters in the context of short breaks provision, the research will involve working with:

- Spousal carers and their partner with dementia, to explore what makes a meaningful short break and to capture the impact of short breaks.
- Social work practitioners, to understand how short break needs and preferences are discussed and to identify examples of innovative provision.
- Strategic staff, to understand the changing short breaks landscape and explore ways to effectively commission and deliver innovative short breaks in the future.

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