TEMPLATE ARTICLE FOR INTRANET

Carers’ week 10 -16 June

**It’s time we talked about carers; time we looked after them too**

As 10th June 2019 ushers in the start of Carers Week, it is the moment when we should stop and take in the sheer scale of how many of those around us are carers. Carers for those in later life, those with disabilities, those with long term health conditions or cancer, and those with mental health problems. This is an unpaid army of unsung heroes, often selflessly losing sight of their own health and dreams, as they commit themselves to the care of others.

According to research from the Carers Trust, there are 7 million carers in the UK, saving the economy £132 billion per year; a fact so powerful, it really should be on the side of a bus. 3 out of 5 of us will be carers at some point in our lives, and for many that will be in mid-life, though there are estimated to be at least 376,000 young adult carers in the UK aged 16–25. 47% of carers may be supporting someone for over 90 hours a week, and yet 38% of carers are in full or part-time work as well.

But despite the NHS depending upon carers for long term conditions, end of life care and for those with disabilities, many carers feel undervalued. According to the Carers UK’s “State of Caring Report 2018” a priority for carers was for the NHS “Recognise our contribution and value us.” It is of little surprise that the same report states that 71% of carers in the UK said they had suffered mental ill health as a result of caring. Further, 61% of carers in the UK said they had suffered physical ill health as a result of caring. The burden is great, the costs to the carer concerning, whilst the benefits to the economy and wider society significant. This is an area of marked inequality, which we at Good Thinking want to help with. But before sharing how we can and are starting to help, there is an aspect to caring that you may not have thought about.

It is widely known that doctors should not medically treat their families or anyone else that they have a close relationship with. This makes a lot of sense, and there have been tragedies when this guidance is overlooked. The American Medical Association states the reasons for this include “the doctor’s possible lack of professional objectivity, potential failure to probe sensitive topics or perform an intimate examination, and possible feeling of obligation to perform care for which he or she is unqualified.” Take a moment. Many of the reasons why doctors are not supposed to treat their families, we expect of carers to live with, and those they care for. Of course, this is usually because love, trust and forgiveness on both sides allows for the most difficult moments to borne with sensitivity; but this is a very complex process that should not be taken for granted.

There is hope that technology may help us more with some of the challenges, if not yet – advice on what do to, for example - and sometimes the opportunities ahead might surprise. At an event on using robots for care, a commonly held view was that being cared for by people was better. For older people that was only partly true; a robot helping you in the bathroom, maintained your dignity better.

Technology is already helping in many ways, even today. And for those isolated in their care of someone, being able to access support, and connect with other carers can lessen the loneliness. This is something we are hoping to develop further at Good Thinking, and are talking with Scope, the Alzheimer’s Society, Macmillan and even Money Savings Expert (the financial strain of being a carer is huge) to give our users a broad range of places where they can find support from people they relate to and identify with: ‘people like me’.

We also have a self-assessment tool that can help you check how your mental health is, and soon, we hope at the end of that assessment you can get advice from and opportunities in your local community that could help. There is even a section for carers in the self-assessment.

We also know that carers need to prioritise their own self-care. We have tips to help with that, from trying to manage the anxieties and worries about your situation, to improving your mood through mindfulness, or just simple tips that may help improve sleep. But we need to do more, and we will be working hard to do so.

At a time of rapid global change and shifting values, it is important that we take time in Carers Week to learn something from those who are in many ways supporting us all, through their compassion and sacrifices. And if we can make time to do that, we may then want to create a world where we give something back to them.

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**About the author**

Dr Richard Graham is a Consultant Child & Adolescent Psychiatrist, former Clinical Director of the Adolescent Directorate at the Tavistock Clinic and Clinical Lead for Good Thinking. Over the last decade, his work has centred on the impact of technology on development and health. In 2010 launched the UK’s first Technology Addiction Service for young people at Nightingale Hospital in London. In June 2016, he was appointed the Executive Board of the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS is the British Government’s principal advisory body for online safety and security for children and young people) and Co-Chairs the Digital Resilience Working Group. He also works with the BBC, as Digital Well-being Consultant to the [Own It App Project.](https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2018/childrens-app-own-it?ns_source=twitter&ns_campaign=bbc_press_office&ns_mchannel=social&ns_linkname=corporate)