

News Release

25 January 2011

Launch of card to help people with mental health issues

A small card is set to make a huge difference in helping people with mental health issues deal with everyday situations.

The Dorset Independent Carers' Forum and mental illness charity Rethink have produced a card that can be carried by mental health service users and their carers to alert people to their difficulties and help make interactions easier. It is the size of a credit card and features the blue 'Rethink' logo.

The card is being launched at Dorset County Hospital on 8 February 2011. Initially it will be used in Dorset but Rethink hope to launch it nationally so service users across the UK can benefit from the scheme.

Carer and Forum member Julia Terry explained where the idea for the card came from: "A carer described her experience of taking her husband for a chest x-ray. They arrived in the busy department and handed the x-ray form to the receptionist. The radiographer called the gentleman's name and asked him to go into a cubicle, remove his coat, shirt and jumper and await further instructions – not an unreasonable request to make of a healthy-looking 60 year old.

"But, for this particular gentleman, it was a situation that was frightening and he began to panic. His wife had to explain quickly that she would need to assist her husband. The waiting area was crowded and she was aware that her comment had attracted the interest of a number of people. She hoped that the radiographer would understand the situation without the need for further explanation – she is not ashamed of her husband's mental health problems, but did not want to embarrass him by describing them to the whole room. There was an awkward pause, whilst the two ladies struggled to communicate and then the radiographer responded in a sensitive way and took them both through to the x-ray machine.

"Every mental health service user and every carer will have had similar experiences, many of them far more traumatic than this. We choose our words carefully, resort to inventive non-verbal communication and leave the scene of our embarrassment as quickly as possible.

"The Independent Carers' Forum listened to this story and discussed ways of improving such encounters. Our solution is a card that can be carried by both mental health service users and carers. It is the size of a credit card and the wording on it will help to reduce the difficulties we face every day.

“We think that this card only needs to have one word on it, but to be useful, it needs to be launched with lots of publicity. There is also space on the back so people can add information they think will be useful to them, such as contact details of carers for example.

“We would like people who carry it to feel that it opens doors for them and we believe that it will play a part in breaking down barriers and removing stigma. We hope that it will be helpful in all sorts of situations – when shopping, using public transport, eating out, accessing training and education as well as attending doctors, dentists and hospital appointments.”

For more information about the card and details of how to get hold of one please call Emma Bearpark on 07918 626258 or 01308 459762, Karen Withers (South and West Dorset) on 07866 252046 or Glenda Saunders (North and East Dorset) on 07866 251265.

ENDS

****PRESS LAUNCH INVITATION****

The Rethink card is being launched at Dorset County Hospital on 8 February 2011 from 2pm in Damers Restaurant. The event is being attended by the Chief Executive of Rethink Paul Jenkins. West Dorset MP Oliver Letwin is unable to attend on the day but has sent a message of support to be read out at the launch. There will be photo and interview opportunities.

For more information please contact:

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