Mental Health

Circle Welfare Officer role

Signs of deterioration in mental health can act as a trigger to encourage specific action that can be taken before it is too late to do so when a person has lost cognitive ability.

Research shows that one in four experience some kind of mental health issue, so it is helpful to have a basic understanding of:

- the issues
- symptoms
- sources of support
- timely action that can be taken such as
    - making or revising a Will
    - making a Lasting Power of Attorney (a) Welfare and (b) Property and Financial Affairs where an Enduring Power of Attorney does not exist

There are existing handouts to help the Circle Welfare Officer to explore and offer guidance on these topics: -

- Wills
- Anticipating loss of mental capacity and putting measures in place in good time
- Some sensible things to do for 'Peace of Mind' and to help others who will have to deal with your affairs - Protecting yourself against yourself
- Lasting Power of Attorney
- Court of Protection
    - procedures that arise when cognitive ability is lost and there is no valid Enduring Power of Attorney or Lasting Power of Attorney in place

Some of that material part can be passed over as it is or it might be more appropriate, given the individual circumstances, to break it down into chunks making it easier to assimilate, understand and most importantly to then act.

The 'Anticipating loss of mental capacity and putting measures in place in good time' handout sets out in detail many of the symptoms / indicators that might suggest early intervention.

With an ageing Circle membership, it is not uncommon to find Brothers who freely admit to struggling to remember names or what they did that morning. Signals such as that are a 'Amber warning light' suggesting appropriate nudges concerning some matters that are best Addressed before it is too late to do so. Sound forward planning facing the realities of later life not' burying heads in the sand'.

So, key elements to consider: -

- awareness of early signs that suggest timely intervention is appropriate
- best way to broach the topic perhaps with the spouse or Brother in a manner that is not intrusive or offensive
- consider the language and what is said
- identification of possible support measures or guidance aids such as the handouts referred to already
- what to do if someone becomes emotional or upset

Broaching the topic

Sometimes just having someone who will listen to them is a comfort but this requires active listening to manage their expectations around the support that they might need and what as Circle Welfare Officer can be delivered.

Would it be better to broach the subject with the spouse, Brother, known friend or relation about possible concerns?

Is there a Brother or wife in Circle well known and trusted who might better lead?

Dropping into the conversation another case, as an example of what had happened where they had not taken timely action, can prompt the person to open up and seek guidance to prevent the same happening to them and their family.

Open ended questions can open up feelings, thoughts, and concerns. Such as: -

'Is there anything we can do to help?'

'Who do you feel you can go to for support?'

'What would you like to see I place for your own peace of mind going forward?'

Closed ended questions that require a 'Yes or 'No' answer can be used to test understanding or check that the person does already have an up to date Will, Enduring Power of Attorney (EPA) or Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA).

If the person does not understand what an EPA or LPA are then in all probability they do not have one. That would then easily lead into the suggestion that the person considers the importance and value of having one for peace of mind and control.

Consider the language and what is said

It is always important to be positive and encourage then person to help themselves.

Do not be judgemental or make assumptions about anyone. Danger of misinterpreting body language or what has been said or done.

Right tone, pace and words used given their current state of physical and mental health.

Above all, it is important to provide reassurance to the person you are supporting and not present them with a fresh set of problems to vex their minds. Encourage the person to do which will make them happiest.

What to do if someone becomes emotional or upset

Some suggestions to help the Circle Welfare Officer should someone become emotional or upset: -

- try to remain calm
- reassure them that it is OK to be upset
- ask if there is anyone they would like to be contacted on their behalf
- be sensitive and sympathetic
- be respectful
- confirm that the discussion can continue at a pace that suits them or on another occasion

Remember not to take on responsibility for solving a person's mental health and all their issues. There might be other family members who can do that.

Sources of information and support

Alzheimer's Society insights about dementia and support
https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/ Support line 0333 150 3456

Mental Health Foundation range of content designed to give more information about mental health and to help look after mental health.
https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/your-mental-health
https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/your-mental-health/getting-help

MIND information and support
https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/ Infoline 0300 123 3393

NHS list of charities, organisations and support groups run by volunteers that can help someone with their mental health
https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/stress-anxiety-depression/mental-health-helplines/

RETHINK crisis support pages to find out which organisations can provide the most appropriate support depending on the circumstances
https://www.rethink.org/aboutus/what-we-do/advice-and-information-service/get-help-now/

TOGETHER a national mental health charity working alongside people with mental health issues on their journey towards independent and fulfilling lives
https://www.together-uk.org/ Telephone 020 7780 7300