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The professional association for social work and social workers

Safeguarding Adults: It's Everybody's Business conference

The Impact of the pandemic on protecting the rights of adults

Jackie Mahoney – Co Chair BASW England Adult Group

Liz Howard- Professional Officer BASW England

Who are the British Association of Social Workers?

- **The British Association of Social Workers (BASW) is the professional association for social work in the UK.**

- **With over 20,000 members we exist to promote the best possible social work services for all people who may need them.**

- **Our members are social work professionals committed to the highest standards of practice and ethics.**

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Aims of the session

- To reflect on the factors impacting on rights based approaches to practice during the covid-19 pandemic.
- To share BASW's response and key messages from social workers, people and families.
- Consider what we have learnt in order to uphold human rights and safeguard adults going forward.

What do we know about Adult Safeguarding during the covid-19 pandemic?

- **The Local Government Association's Covid-19 Adult Safeguarding Insight Project tracked the impact of the pandemic on adult safeguarding work.**

- **This project revealed that Pandemic-related delays in responding to adult safeguarding concerns resulted in "severe consequences" for people accessing or in need of services.**

- **Findings revealed late reporting of safeguarding concerns with the link being made to problems becoming far more acute, complex and harmful.**

Covid delays in adult safeguarding have led to 'severe consequences' for people needing services

Third part of LGA safeguarding study warns of rising complexity and intensity of concerns, with big variance between local authority areas

by Alex Turner on December 14, 2021 in Adults, Social work leaders

Growing ‘intensity’ of safeguarding issues

- Common themes that emerged included:
- Challenges in the provider market, mental health impacts of lockdown and social isolation, issues for people with learning disabilities and people experiencing homelessness, increasing pressures on family carers, challenges regarding prevention and the changing use of technology.
- Councils reported dealing with concerns of increasing complexity and “intensity”, for example where domestic abuse was coupled with other abuse types such as psychological, financial and physical abuse, and coercive control.
- The report found that preventative measures were often not able to be deployed at an earlier stage due to delayed reporting which increased risk and harm.

What did Social Workers say …

- **More than three-quarters of respondents (77.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that they had increased concerns with regard to the capacity to safeguard/protect adults and children.**

- **51.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they had encountered more difficulties in monitoring safeguarding access/carrying out safe and effective adult and child protection visits because of limited face-to face access.**

- **79% agreed or strongly agreed that they had encountered more difficulties in accessing essential support services for the people with whom they worked. Intervention and early help for vulnerable adults, children and families is still not readily accessible.**

Virtual Working

- The 2020 member survey showed us that social workers innovated quickly and largely successfully in response to restrictions by bringing services online, including video calls and more digital contact with service users.

- This digital leap forward ran parallel with emergency house and face-to-face visits continuing.

- However, 69.7% agreed that they had encountered more difficulties in communicating with people with lived experience and their families because of issues associated with the digital exclusion.

https://www.basw.co.uk/system/files/resources/basw_social_working_during_the_covid_19_pandemic_initial_findings_26.01.21.pdf

Working in a hybrid / virtual new world- Observations from practice

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Virtual ways of working have had an impact on Social Work practice/Student Placements:

- Feeling strange as not the 'normal' way of completing an assessment
- Concern not able to capture the full picture / information of the situation
- Unsure who is in the room when completing the assessment. Concern in some situations not getting the true information i.e. Domestic abuse; the person of interest being in the room
- Does not feel like a natural, connective environment
- Difficulties in terms of equipment for those people in poverty i.e. computers, internet ready mobile phones
- Ensuring privacy and confidentiality
- Missing observational/sensory information not being in the house
- Not able to access peer support, sharing knowledge, emotional support, practical support
- Not having human contact with team, practice educator, other social workers all the time

Discharge to Assess Key Themes and Top 3 Challenges: October-December 2020

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Thematic Area	Responses
Resources	Not enough resources to support this model Sourcing care packages quickly enough for flow of new patients to discharge to assess beds problematic Lack of resources - social workers to meet demand
Discharge arrangements	Cited in survey responses- Unsafe discharge leading to re-admission Information missed or incomplete leaving people at risk Timescales impractical- 2- hour turnaround
Human Rights	Rights not upheld, decisions were being made for people Completing a good legally compliant mental capacity the assessment Misunderstanding of MCA in some situations leading to risk averse decision making and more restrictive arrangements: care home on discharge

Key Messages from Social Work Practitioners

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"We are unable to visit the hospital wards unless support is required for safeguarding concerns of mental capacity. We are unable to liaise with the individual themselves or able to gather accurate information. I fear this is becoming the norm."

"It makes me anxious to separate couples/families by placing one into a care home as that is the recommendation for discharge. You then can have a husband and wife for instance that haven't seen each other for weeks and then one of them could die. "

"My team and I have huge concerns regarding the legality of MCA's and BI decisions being made. We are told frequently that someone lacks capacity and those assessments appear to be undertaken by individuals who don't understand the legal framework. There are too many occasions where an individual has expressed a wish to go home they have been assessed as lacking capacity, whereas if they had agreed to go to a care home they are reported as having capacity."

Discharge to Assess

- BASW England consultation with members identified a number of concerns regarding dilution of the social work role and contribution with the assessment process no longer being undertaken in hospital settings.
- Social workers reported concerns about choice and involvement in decision making for individuals and families, some examples of risk-averse practice leading to an increase in the number of people being discharged into care homes. Examples of restrictions imposed on seeing family and friends and issues with being able to review these arrangements within the required timescales.
- BASW England has continued to express concerns about the Discharge to Assess policy and model and does not support this approach to hospital discharge.
- During the consultation period of the then Health and Care Bill (now Act) BASW publicly opposed the removal of key requirements contained within the Care Act statutory guidance which related directly to the involvement of social care at key decision making points.

Test, Safe Access, Rights Campaign

- **BASW Test, Safe Access, Promote Rights campaign sought changes to political and Public Health guidance in England and Wales.**

- **We called for a change to national guidance to allow social workers regular and safe access to health and care settings including supported living, in order to carry out statutory duties on behalf of public bodies and protect the human rights of citizens.**

Test, Safe Access, Rights Campaign

- https://youtu.be/YgyVQs_wniQ

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Test, Safe Access, Rights Campaign

- Social workers undertake statutory and non- statutory duties on behalf of Local authorities and the NHS but along with families and loved ones were Prevented from gaining safe access due to a lack of prioritisation for Regular Testing.

- Our campaign identified that access to individuals by professionals in care and health settings had been restricted and in a lot of cases prevented. The balance in our view tipped to safeguard Article 2 the right to life and in doing so the interference and subsequent breach of Article 8 right to private and family life ensued.

- We called for the guidance contained within the adult social care covid-19 winter plan to emphasise the role of social workers in assisting with the assessment of risk for visits.

- Our campaign activity continues. BASW England recognises the value and importance of maintaining relationships. Through our Test, Safe Access, Rights campaign https://www.basw.co.uk/covid-19/test-safe-access-promote-rights
- We continue to advocate for safe access to care settings including the use of masks and testing by family and friends and professional visitors.

Support from BASW During the Pandemic and beyond

- **We ran two surveys capturing feedback from social workers to hear what the issues are, highlighting to social work leaders what the priorities for social work are and reinforcing the need for human rights based decision making.**
- Speaking out in the media on the issues social workers are facing.
- Regular support forums for social workers focussing on human rights based practice.
- Issuing a revised version of the code of ethics and guidance.
- Set up the Professional Support Service- Free peer coaching for members
- **Test Access Rights campaign: https://www.basw.co.uk/test-safe-access-promote-rights/get-involved**

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The current context for adult safeguarding

- There is widespread recognition that significant investment in social care is required to reverse the detrimental impact of austerity.
- We continue to lobby the government to implement a full funding solution now to provide sufficient, high-quality social work and social care services, to stabilise supply and develop the workforce at a time of crisis in recruitment and retention across social care.
- Only urgent moves to increase funding and to improve pay, terms and conditions for the social care workforce will ensure a step change in dignity and wellbeing for all citizens who have the right to support to lead a life free from abuse.

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