

# checklist 2

**For groups for people in touch with health services (including patients' groups) and groups for relatives of people using services (including carers' groups), when asked to nominate someone to attend meetings**



# About the phrase 'people in touch with health services'

When using health services people can call themselves patients, service users or members of the public. In this checklist the term 'people in touch with health services' or a variation on this is used to cover everyone using health services.

## Before the meeting

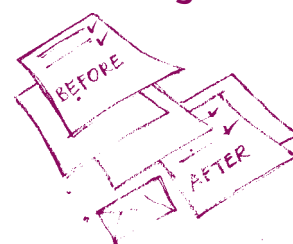
### Skills and experience

Groups that support or represent people who use health services and/or relatives of people using services - sometimes called patients' groups or carers' groups - will have a wide range of skills and experiences. If your group spends time thinking about the resources its members have, they can then be called upon when the situation arises.

### Thinking about what you want to achieve, and what you can contribute

When your group is asked to send someone to a formal meeting think about the following issues:

- where will you put your energies?
- what are your priorities?
- can you represent both your individual members and the wider group of people who are connected, perhaps because of a particular health problem?
- what specific things do you want to change?
- who are the people who can make these changes, and how can you reach them?
- what skills and knowledge can your members contribute?
- have your members ideas for helping other people cope with a particular health problem?



## Is it important for someone to join this meeting?

- what would happen if someone could not attend this meeting?
- are there other ways for people to put their views forward?
- could you choose an issue or report to examine first and then arrange to meet with staff to explain your views?
- how relevant will the experience be of the person the group is going to nominate?

is worth discussing these points when your group first receives an invitation to a meeting?



## Replying to the invitation to join the meeting

Points you can cover at this stage are:

- state if you are nominating 2 people, or even more
- is the person going as a representative, a delegate, or as an individual bringing a general perspective (see page 9 of the general 'checklists for meetings')?
- ask for a clear remit for the meeting if this is not explained in the invitation
- ask how the expenses will be paid, and what is covered
- ask when the agenda, and the papers that go with it, will be sent to you
- if you need a certain amount of time to consult with group members explain this to the organiser of the meeting.

### Purpose and scope of the meeting

Find out from the person organising the meeting:

- whether the meetings are ongoing or will last until a task is completed
- which services and what situations it will look at
- what your role is
- how the meeting fits into the wider decision-making processes
- how to get hold of other background information you need.



## Outcomes of the meeting

Check that your group is clear what this meeting is expected to achieve.

- is it a decision making meeting or does it have an advisory role?
- what impact will it have on services for individual people?
- what impact will it have on services overall?
- how will it help people with health difficulties and their relatives influence the development of services?

If you think the purpose or outcomes from the meeting should be different, say so when you reply to the invitation, or ask for a meeting beforehand to discuss this.

*‘For me, it’s got better over time. I still draw on my experience as a carer, but I’ve found how to put things so that I don’t get too upset. Being able to refer to the experience of other carers is also a great improvement on the days when it was just me. ’*

*‘ One thing we have learned as a user group, is to get much better at our preparation, and to ask more questions before we send someone along to every meeting we’re asked to. ’*

## Practical help

The person organising the meeting should be able to offer practical support and advice in the following areas:

- expenses such as travel or child care
- using office equipment such as phones and computers
- information on how to get to the meeting
- providing interpreters, and different formats for written information for example on audio-tape or computer
- support with travel arrangements, and information on access to buildings and toilets if someone uses a wheelchair or has difficulty walking

See pages 11 to 13 of the general ‘checklists for meetings’ booklet ~ that accompanies this booklet ~ for fuller details.

# Preparing for the meeting

Talk before the meeting as a group about what you want your representatives to say. Think about:

- which issues are the most important to raise
- which other people going to the meeting could be contacted beforehand to discuss a complex issue
- how to make general points that go beyond one person's personal experience
- whether you can make links with other groups of people in touch with services and/or relatives of people who use services
- whether to make a 'what to do if' plan with someone else attending the meeting if one issue is particularly difficult or upsetting
- when it's acceptable for a group for people who use services to speak for relatives, and vice versa
- what the meeting's purpose and scope is, and therefore what your representative can realistically achieve.

## Links between representatives at different meetings

Sometimes a group will have nominated different people to attend meetings to spread the load. For example, there could be one or two people going to the meetings about health services in your local area, someone else to the meetings about services for people with a particular condition, and another person going to a series of meetings about discharge planning when people go home from hospital.

As well as working with each person to prepare for that particular meeting, it is useful to make sure that all these people know what is going on in all the other discussions. The advantages for the individuals, and for the group as a whole, are:

- people can reinforce points made by colleagues if the opportunity arises
- you can give a consistent message across all these meetings
- you can make sure that one of the meetings your group attends takes final responsibility for an issue
- the individuals may want to give some support or practical advice to each other.

Ways of enabling your members who are involved in different meetings to link up include:

- making sure that each person gets feedback on all the meetings, such as copies of the minutes
- having a co-ordination meeting every few months
- using the group's own meetings to talk over issues raised at all of the health service meetings.

Sometimes two or more groups representing people who use services and/or relatives of people using services are invited to send representatives to a meeting. It will be useful if the groups and the organiser or chair of the meeting spend time thinking how these groups can support each other.

# After the meeting

Representatives of groups may find, at least at first, both the meetings and the travel involved tiring. The issues raised at the meetings can be upsetting too.

## Getting support

Arranging for the representative to talk after the meeting with someone else from the group can be very helpful.

## Feeding back

- what are the arrangements for the person reporting back to the group?
- how is this recorded?
- how is it fed in to the next meeting?
- how will outstanding issues from the last meeting be followed up?



Agree a timescale with the representative for feeding back information, so that the group has plenty of time to decide what to do next.

## Practical arrangements

Check that the representative knows what equipment and support is available to them; for example a phone, a fax, a computer, someone with some time to type up notes. If your group doesn't have access to such practical support, check with the organiser of the meeting to see what they can offer. Organisations like the local Council of Voluntary Organisations may also be able to help.