

Unpaid Carers

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Baroness Pitkeathley asked whether the Government were taking steps to ensure the NHS gives more support to unpaid carers.

Baroness Blake of Leeds, for the Government, said they recognised the vital contribution of unpaid carers and were committed to improving support through the NHS and social care. She said the 10-year health plan would systematically capture data on unpaid carers to ensure recognition, involvement in care planning, and better access to support. The plan would also introduce a “*My Carer*” feature on the NHS app, allowing carers to manage appointments and communicate with clinical teams.

Baroness Pitkeathley welcomed the inclusion of carers in the 10-year plan but said a Carers UK survey found that carers’ rights were being ignored during hospital discharges. Only 14% of carers were asked about their ability to provide care after discharge, despite having a legal right to be consulted. She said this was both unlawful and short-sighted, as carer breakdown often led to hospital readmissions.

Baroness Blake thanked her for her longstanding commitment and said the Government recognised the concerns raised in the Carers UK report. She said NHS bodies and local authorities had a duty to involve carers from the earliest stages of discharge planning, under the Hospital Discharge and Community Support Guidance. The Care Quality Commission was assessing local authority performance under the Care Act 2014, and the Secretary of State could intervene if authorities failed to meet their obligations.

Lord Laming recounted a carer’s experience accompanying someone with severe dementia to hospital. The doctor focused on the computer rather than the patient, and when the carer tried to assist, they were treated as merely a chauffeur. He said it was time to properly value unpaid carers, recognise their insight, and make them feel respected.

Baroness Blake said he was right to highlight this, adding that the “golden thread” of the 10-year plan was to enhance the status of carers. She said that through initiatives such as the My Carer app, there would be “no excuse” for professionals to ignore their role and experience.

Lord Young of Cookham said there were over one million young carers in the UK, including 15,000 giving more than 50 hours of care each week and 3,000 aged between five and nine. Many missed school, and identification often took three years. He asked what could be done through primary care and children’s services to identify and support them earlier.

Baroness Blake said it was unacceptable that schools were unaware of young carers’ circumstances, such as when children were punished for lateness caused by caring duties. She said all agencies must work together locally to share information, drawing on models such as family group conferencing in children’s social care. She acknowledged that some young carers concealed their role out of fear of family separation and said building confidence and co-ordination across services was essential.

Baroness Tyler of Enfield said the recent Carers UK survey found that 51% of unpaid carers needed more NHS support, and she asked how many had received statutory needs assessments and what had happened to expenditure on carer support over the past three years.

Baroness Blake said she did not have the figures to hand but would provide them in writing. She said low confidence among carers was a serious issue, and more collaboration was needed to “wrap support around them.” Evidence from local agencies would help shape future plans.

Lord Kamall said unpaid carers played a profoundly challenging and selfless role, often neglecting their own health. He asked what steps were being taken to make carers aware of their rights and the support available, and whether the Government had considered accommodation challenges for live-in carers, as raised in amendments to the Renters Rights Bill.

Baroness Blake said NHS England was working closely with local authorities, GPs, and Integrated Care Boards to ensure greater local collaboration and that carers’ voices were central to policymaking. She said the Government would write to Lord Kamall on the housing point.

The Lord Bishop of Leeds asked whether the Government believed the balance between state and charitable support for carers was appropriate.

Baroness Blake said the question was central to ongoing discussions and that the aim was to achieve the right balance and create a comprehensive support package for unpaid carers.

Lord Bradley said the carer’s allowance did not reflect the “extraordinary value” of unpaid carers’ work and asked if an urgent review would be included in the forthcoming social care review led by Baroness Casey.

Baroness Blake confirmed that Baroness Casey had already begun work on the review and had met with carers in one of her first meetings. She said a portal had been opened for evidence submissions and that this issue would attract “a lot of interest and concern.”