

## Review

# A review of instruments developed to measure outcomes for carers of people with mental health problems

Harvey K, Catty J, Langman A, Winfield H, Clement S, Burns E, White S, Burns T. A review of instruments developed to measure outcomes for carers of people with mental health problems.

**Objective:** Community-based care for mental disorders places considerable burden on families and carers. Measuring their experiences has become a priority, but there is no consensus on appropriate instruments. We aimed to review instruments carers consider relevant to their needs and assess evidence for their use.

**Method:** A literature search was conducted for outcome measures used with mental health carers. Identified instruments were assessed for their relevance to the outcomes identified by carers and their psychometric properties.

**Results:** Three hundred and ninety two published articles referring to 241 outcome measures were identified, 64 of which were eligible for review (used in three or more studies). Twenty-six instruments had good psychometric properties; they measured (i) carers' well-being, (ii) the experience of caregiving and (iii) carers' needs for professional support.

**Conclusion:** Measures exist which have been used to assess the most salient aspects of carer outcome in mental health. All require further work to establish their psychometric properties fully.

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### Summations

- Carer outcomes can be measured in three domains: carers' well-being, their experience of caregiving and carers' needs for professional support.
- Candidate instruments with some published psychometric data are available for each of these areas; the choice of instrument depends on both the question and the subjects.
- Carer outcomes should be a routine component of mental health service evaluations.

### Considerations

- Our review was limited to English language publications and two main databases.
- There may be published psychometric data on some measures which we failed to identify.
- The consultation exercise was unable to include all potential carer groups (e.g. very young carers, some minority ethnic groups).

### Introduction

The last 50 years has witnessed a worldwide reduction in in-patient care for mental illness with the closure of mental hospitals and the shift in focus to the community (1, 2). While there is

considerable evidence of the development of a range of community mental health services (3) to replace institutional care, much of the care received by patients is from informal carers who have shouldered a substantial part of the burden (4). These families, partners and friends may often