

Hospital Maidstone

February 2025

Hello and welcome to our Winter edition of our Newsletter

I'm not sure if you've noticed, but the days are already getting longer, the birds are singing in the mornings, and the first snowdrops and daffodils are starting to bloom.

It's so refreshing to see signs of upcoming Spring popping up in the garden and all around. Spring, along with the start of the year, is also a time for planning and looking ahead.

We have planned some exciting events for you and trusting we will meet you there either online or face-to-face. Watch the space!

As usual we've put some interesting information together in this newsletter and we hope you enjoying reading it.

And a reminder that, whatever your caring circumstances, we are here to support you.

Jutta Neumann and the Carer Support Team

We want to take the opportunity to acknowledge and thank all mental health nursing staff across the UK and especially at **Cygnet Hospital Maidstone** for everything they do to support the care, treatment, and recovery of people from all walks of life—particularly the ones you care for as well. We recognize their vital role in HealthCare and the difference they make in patients lives every day.

We want to acknowledge the support they offer to you as carers too. By knowing you loved one is looked after, is safe and treated with respect and dignity you can relax and look after your own wellbeing!

At Cygnet Maidstone Hospital we recognise the incredible difference our mental health nursing team are making to the lives of people we care for—your loved ones. We have staff working in many roles across our hospital who are compassionate about the care they deliver every day and who go beyond and above.

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The intention of the occasion is to celebrate the accomplishments of mental health nurses nationally and globally and examine the challenges and explore solutions.

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Your feedback as carers is vital and is encouraging.

Cygnet Maidstone have been working hard to improve our Care and Carer engagement and support. This is an ongoing process, where we are committed to listening to feedback and continuously reviewing our processes to learn and improve the care we provide to the people you care for and the support to you as Carers.

Please do let us know—the good and the bad things that we can learn and improve. If it matters to you it matters to us!

But let us take the opportunity to celebrate, describe and promote the unique, diverse and specialist profession of **Mental Health Nursing** this month.

Cas Holmes, local artist, author and Carer herself.

<https://casholmes.uk>

Cas Holmes is a painter turned textile artist who works predominantly with found materials that she retrieves from any place that she can find and the world around her. She is one of the UK's most popular mixed media artist. Her accomplishments includes the publication of several books and countless national and international exhibits. Cas Holmes is trained as well in community arts working in areas of health, education and environmental arts practice.

Her partner Derek is a 'stroke survivor' and over the last three years she has become a carer herself. Cas is not alone in striving to balance caring responsibilities with her practice, the 2021 Census suggests there are 5.7 million unpaid carers across the UK, mostly women. Cas is very passionate about to raise awareness about her lived experience as a carer .

In December 2024 she was invited to Carers Poverty Coalition Parliamentary Drop in session;

"I was delighted to be invited to the Carers Poverty Coalition Parliamentary Drop in session last week by the We Care Campaign

The Carers Poverty Coalition. is composed of 130 organisations including Oxfam Great Britain and Carers UK held it's first event in parliament on Tuesday. I was invited to share my experience alongside twenty other carers to discuss our lived experience of caring and the problems of navigating the systems in place, and the financial stresses we face as carers.

Amongst the many I managed to talk with on the day I was pleased to speak with Alison Bennett, the Lib Dem spokesperson on Care and Carers about the issues of being a free-lancer and carer. Here's a photo of Alison, myself and Katy Styles who heads the We Care Campaign . Yes, I am holding a dandelion. I gave several out on the day to each MP or parliamentary representative I had a conversation with. The symbol of resilience and strength in adversity."



In the middle: Cas Holmes

Cas Holmes

"We Care Campaign" fights for the rights of Unpaid Carers and broader support. They are determined that unpaid carers voices are heard and that the contribution to society is valued .You can read more and support the campaign here:

<https://wecarecampaign.org.uk>



Petitions

UK Government and Parliament

Increase Carer's Allowance to equal minimum wage

There is a petition set up regarding increasing Carer's Allowance to equal the minimum wage. If you are interested in reading more about this and signing the register, please following the link.
Carer's Allowance is currently £327.60 every 4 weeks for people who care for someone for at least 35 hours per week. Around £2.34 p/hour.

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/700028>

Remember your voice matters! Getting your voice heard ! Advocating effectively means asserting your own needs as well!

Caring can be both rewarding and isolating. Self-advocacy involves making your needs known and speaking up for the person you care for. Our **Cygnnet Advice and Liaison Service (CAL)** will be a point of contact for Cygnnet relatives, carers and friends who require non-clinical advice or assistance regarding Cygnnet Services. CALS will liaise with the appropriate staff or service to ensure carers' suggestions, feedback or queries are addressed.

During the trial phase (November 2024 – February 2025) CALS will be operational **Tuesday** and **Thursday** between 10am – 2pm, when a dedicated team will respond to queries. A review will take place in February 2025 to determine whether the service should be operational Monday – Friday.

CALS can be contacted via email
CALS@cygnnethealth.co.uk.



Our Carer's Advocacy Support provided by **Black Belt Advocacy** can help you to get your voice heard and advocate for yourself and the person you care for. They are dedicated to support carers and is very distinct from the advocacy service that is available to patients, who already have access to advocacy through a dedicated service for patients and residents. Learn about your rights to access the right support for yourself and the person you care for.

Check out the website for more information:

<https://www.blackbeltadvocacy.com>

Phone 0808 175 0787

carers@katemercer-training.com

Caring and Me

Do you look after an adult family member or friend with a long-term physical or mental health condition, addiction, or age-related frailty? Join our 6 week Caring and Me course, where you can meet other carers, discuss your experiences in a supportive environment, and explore new ways of managing in your caring role. Our upcoming course dates:

Aylesford: Tuesdays, **18th March - 22nd April**, 10:30am - 12:30pm

Paddock Wood: Wednesdays, **19th March - 23rd April**, 2:00pm - 4:00pm

Online: Thursdays, **20th March - 24th April**, 6:00pm - 7:30pm via Teams

Carers must first be registered with Involve. To find out more and book your space, email

hello@involvekent.org.uk

or call 03000 810005



This space is for you!

This space in our newsletter has been created especially for you. If you have a top tip, a story, a book recommendation or anything else you would love to share with other carers then please do !!! Send us an email:

ffmaidstone@cygnnethealth.co.uk



2025 marks our 60th anniversary, and is a time to reflect on our

journey so far, as well as an opportunity to honour the millions of carers who have been at the heart of everything we do.

Find out more about the last 60 years of caring and how you can get involved.

<https://www.carersuk.org/about-us/60-years-of-carers-uk/>



**Do you know that we have phones and tablets on each ward that you can reach your loved one, even they are not allowed to have their phone on them !
Please ask the ward!**



Carers Poetry Competition

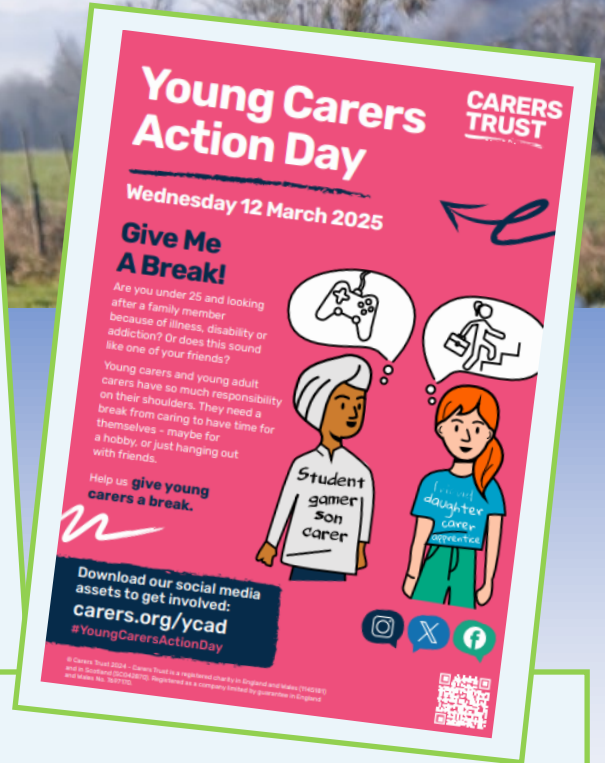
Carers UK's Poetry Competition is now open!
For this year's competition, they are welcoming poems on the theme of 'caring, family and community'.
 If you enjoy creative writing and want to submit a poem or two, they would love to hear from you – and you will be in with a chance of winning a prize by entering!

- 1st prize = £100 voucher
- 2nd prize = £50 voucher
- 3rd prize = £30 voucher
- Carers UK member prize = £50 voucher

If you're looking for a bit of inspiration to unlock your creativity, join the **Share and Learn session on Thursday 20 February**. Carers UK will be joined for a relaxing, informal creative writing class by Fiona and Susan from Open Book, who can help you to prepare your poems for the competition.

Deadline is 20th April 2025.

<https://www.carersuk.org/get-involved/join-us/poetry-competition>



Why joining a Carer Support Group

Carers who looking after someone with mental health issues play an essential role - first and foremost for the person they care for - and for our society. Even though quite often they get the impression they are being overlooked or not enough valued and appreciated.

The Carer journey itself has his own challenges and can be isolating and exhausting by balancing your own life and personal responsibilities. To experience you are not alone in this and connect with people who are in the same boat can by itself empowering but there are more reasons why you should connect with others carers.

- **Having a safe space where you are understood and don't need to explain yourself and where you can vent without judgement is priceless.**
- **By sharing your stories you learn from others. You gain knowledge about medication, behaviour, support, navigation the healthcare system and a lot more. You might get information about resources and support services you didn't know before. By joining forces you can better advocate and challenge systems and policies.**
- **Sharing tips and strategies about managing stress and anxiety can be lifesaving and empowering.**

Still not convinced?!

Give it a go and join our next **Carer Support Zoom Group**. Looking forward to seeing you there!

19th February 6.00pm – 7.00 pm

We, as the **Maidstone Carer Support Team** are happy to help you to find a **face-to-face group** near you. Please let us know!



Carer Support Team

Maidstone Hospital

ffcMaidstone@cygnethealth.co.uk

General Manager

Alison McCulloch 01622 580 411
 Alison.McCulloch@cygnethealth.co.uk

Carer Lead

Jutta Neumann 01622 580 330
 JuttaNeumann@cygnethealth.co.uk

Roseacre

01622 580 440
 Saskia Hills — Social Worker/Carer Lead
 Saskia.Hills@cygnethealth.co.uk

Kingswood

01622 580 363
 Helen Whitehead — Social Worker/Carer Lead
 Helen.Whitehead@cygnethealth.co.uk

Bearsted

01622 580 355
 Perri Osborne — Social Worker/Carer Lead
 Perri.Osborne@cygnethealth.co.uk

Saltwood

01622 580 403
 Paula Tappenden — Social Worker/Carer Lead
 Paula.Tappenden@cygnethealth.co.uk
 Rebecca Odubono — Social Work Assistant
 01622 580 321 Carer Lead Assistant

Cygnet Hospital Maidstone

Gidds Pond Way, off Newnham Court Way, Weaving, Maidstone, ME14 5FT

phone 01622 580 330

www.Cygnetgroup.com

ffcmaidstone@cygnethealth.co.uk

