

## **Worksheet 6.7: Building empathy with the care team – the changing places task**

Edi will particularly pick up on differences between their parents' opinions and their care team's approach. The family might feel the care team are not doing enough. The care team might be feeling that the family are expecting too much too soon, that the family don't trust them and that the family are always looking for the negatives. Communication is key to helping resolve this.

The aim of this exercise is to help you to build empathy for both the care team's professional stance and also how the care team might be feeling. Understanding that care teams don't have a magic wand and that every case presents with its own unique challenging issues can be helpful. In addition, care teams can be under a great deal of pressure with limited resources, high staff turnover and high levels of absenteeism due to stress.

### ***Scenario***

Adele, age 14, has been an in-patient in a general adolescent unit for 4 weeks. Her diagnosis is complex and includes a history of suicidal ideation, depression and both restrictive and binge/purge behaviours. Her parents, Jenny and Steve are worried that Adele isn't settling in well and there seems to have been a lack of consistency with therapists coming and going. They think that this must be having an adverse effect on the ability of the care team to engage with Adele. Jenny and Steve have a meeting with Adele's care nurse after a ward round and she suggests that Adele should be coming home in a few weeks. On the basis of this information Jenny and Steve prepare for the first Multidisciplinary Team (MDT) meeting, and they carefully put together a list of questions that they would like to ask.

Meanwhile the MDT have decided that Adele is not ready to start thinking about discharge and, in fact, it is likely that she will need several more months of in-patient care. They anticipate that Jenny and Steve will not respond well to this news and that they are likely to arrive at the meeting with a long list of demands.

### ***The changing places task***

Ask the carers to imagine they are the care team and are feeling that the parents are focusing too much on the detail of their daughter's care plan and not focusing on the bigger picture of recovery and maintaining normal family life. List the things you might say to the parents to encourage them to take a step back. The care team might say for example:

- We have a great deal of experience and you need to trust us that we will help her and keep her safe.
- Recovery is a very complex process and it is important that we are all patient and move at the pace of the sufferer, not the pace that we would prefer.

Think about these issues:

- What might they say about the patient?
- What might they say about the impact on carers of the illness?
- What might they say about things carers could do to find out more about the illness?
- What might they say about the carers accessing local support groups and/or role modelling self care?

How would you feel if the care team presented these sorts of arguments in a calm and compassionate manner? Criticism and hostility are never helpful, however aggrieved you might be feeling. This doesn't mean that you have to blindly accept everything that the care team says. Carers are always entitled to ask questions and to fight for the best treatment possible. This can be done in a positive and motivational way using the communication skills that you have learnt.