

## **Involving carer advisors in evidence synthesis to improve carers' mental health during end-of-life home care: co-production during Covid-19 remote working**

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#### **Gunn Grande**

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- NIHR HS&DR NIHR 16/02/18: An evidence synthesis of holistic services for refractory breathlessness in advanced malignant and non-malignant disease (CI Maddocks). £128,612, 14 months, Start February 2017.
- NIHR SCPR FR11: Seedcorn funding for SNAP2 preparatory work. (CI Gardener). £9,696, 3 months, Start December 2016.
- NIHR RfPB PB-PG-0712-28073: Effects of ambulatory oxygen on breathlessness, quality of life and mobility in patients with idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis. (CI Renzoni). £317,202, 30 months, Start August 2014.

## **Maria Panagioti**

### Grants

- NIHR GMPSTRC-2012-1: NIHR Greater Manchester Patient Safety Translational Research Centre (CI Campbell), £7,562,320; 60 months, start 01/04/17.
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- Project 408 NIHR School for Primary Care Research: Investigating burnout in general practitioners and indicators of suboptimal patient care using the RCGP Research Surveillance Centre database (CI Panagioti). £208,631, 24 months, start 01/04/19.
- PR-R20-0318-21001 NIHR Policy Research Programme: Reducing avoidable patient harm in prison health care (CI Shaw). £1,233,446; 48 months, start 01/06/19.

## **Alexander Hodkinson**

### Fellowship

- NIHR 'Three Schools Mental Health' Senior Fellowship. £250,350, 30 months, start January 2020

## **Penny Bee**

### Committee memberships

- Member of NIHR RfPB Northwest Funding Panel 2016-2018 and renewed membership for a second term between 2018-2020.

- Invited member of the Scrutiny Sub-Committee for the RfPB/RfSC Mental Health Research Call in Northern England 2021.
- Holder of 4-year tenure on Subcommittee A Stage 2 Programme Grants from 2022.

#### Grants

- NIHR ARC NIHR200174: NIHR Applied Research Collaboration for Greater Manchester (CI Cullum) – Mental Health Theme. £8,999,722 (£2m Mental Health), 60 months, Start date 01/10/2019
- NIHR i4i NIHR203827: Improving mental health literacy among children and young people aged 11- 16 in the United Kingdom. £150,000, 12 months, Start 01/01/21
- NIHR RfPB PB-PG-0418-20011: Co-Adaptation of a Social Network Intervention to Support Recovery for People living with Severe Mental Illness (ConNEct) (CI Brooks), £150,000, 18 months, Start 01/07/19
- NIHR HTA NIHR 17/80: Psychosocial intervention to address the mental health needs of parents/carers of children newly diagnosed with autism (CI Green), £1,395,164, 42 months, Start 01/05/19
- NIHR HS&DR NIHR 17/09/08: Services to support early intervention and self-care for children and young people referred to Children and Young People's Mental Health services (CI Prymachuk), £643 000, 36 months, Start: 01/10/18
- NIHR PGfAR RP-PG-1016-20010: Enhancing the quality of psychological interventions delivered by telephone (CI Bee), £ 2,524,745, 60 months, Start: 04/02/18,
- NIHR HTA 16/101/02: De-escalation techniques and the use of restrictive interventions in adult mental health units (CI Price), £520,112.84, 30 months, Start 01/01/18
- NIHR HTA 15/38/04: A non-inferiority RCT comparing the clinical and cost -effectiveness of one session treatment with multi-session CBT in children with specific phobias (CI Wright), £1,371,954.00, 48 months, Start 01/01/16
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## Abstract

**Background:** Family carers play a central role in supporting people at the end-of-life (EOL), but often suffer detrimental impacts on their own mental health as a result. This project conducted evidence synthesis of research into factors that may affect carers' mental health to help identify ways of maintaining their mental health. It worked closely with a carer Review Advisory Panel (RAP) to help ensure findings made sense and were communicated meaningfully from carers' perspective.

**Aim:** To present (1) principles and components that facilitated successful Public Patient Involvement (PPI) in an evidence synthesis project to help inform PPI in similar projects; (2) recommendations for carer support that were instigated and produced by the RAP.

### Process and principles

Nine RAP meetings including 4-5 carers, a lay chair and three researchers were held.

Solid 'groundwork' was invested in recruitment and relationship building prior to meetings, and agreement of how to work together and clarification of expectations at first meeting.

Key meeting principles were:

- having a majority of carers, and a Chair with both carer and PPI experience, to ensure carer voices remained at the fore
- substantial researcher representation, including the project lead, to highlight value placed on RAP meetings
- flexibility to follow carers' agendas, enabling 'space to talk' and 'space to change'; and,
- appropriate and prompt carer payment, again emphasising PPI value to project.

Added general principles were: ongoing training, ample funded time for RAP preparation, and ongoing communication outside meetings.

Covid moved all meetings after the first online, but principles were maintained.

### Outputs

The project saw an evolution from PPI consultation to co-production. The main PPI output was recommendations for supporting carers based on project findings, instigated and produced by the RAP.

### Reflection on successful components and challenges

Five carers (including the Chair) and six researchers responded to questions by email. Analysis by one researcher, aided by two other researchers, was then reviewed by all participants and revised. Both carers and researchers felt components that made the PPI work were: (1) a shared sense of purpose of RAP and gains; (2) personal gains; (3) mutual commitment and respect; and (4) bridging between academic and lay perspectives, through investment in training, ensuring carers were able to meaningfully comment, and continuous negotiation and compromise.

Challenges were that the Covid-induced move from face-to-face to online meetings reduced informality, flexibility, personal connection and non-verbal communication. However, earlier groundwork facilitated group resilience to these challenges. PPI representation on the wider Research Management Group proved less successful, flagging the importance of negotiating and defining PPI roles at all project levels.

### Conclusion

The PPI principles employed, including meeting composition and chairing, and flexibility to follow carers' agendas, appeared to facilitate the evolution from consultation to co-production of carer recommendations, but require further testing. Preconditions for successful remote working should be further investigated as the different advantages of face-to-face and virtual meetings may be combined through hybrid working. The iterative and responsive working required for genuine co-production may require more flexible PPI funding models.

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## List of tables and figures, boxes and appendices

- Table 1: List of carer Review Advisory Panel (RAP) meetings
  - Table 2: Summary of Recommendations from carer RAP
  - Box 1: Principles for working with the carer Review Advisory Panel (RAP)
  - Box 2: Ground rules for ways of working
  - Box 3: Reflection questions
- 
- Supplement 1: Carer Recommendations full details

## Glossary

Carer: Family and informal carers/caregivers are used interchangeably to refer to adult lay carers. The term 'lay carer' or 'carer' is defined according to the broad definition adopted by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence: '*Carers, who may or may not be family members, are lay people in a close supportive role who share in the illness experience of the patient and who undertake vital care work and emotion management*', which relates to unpaid carers who might be a partner, family member, friend or neighbour of the person they are caring for.

[National Institute of Clinical Excellence \(NICE\). \*Guidance on Cancer Services, Improving Supportive and Palliative Care for Adults with Cancer, The Manual\*. NICE Guideline; 2004: 159](#)

## Abbreviations

EOL: end-of-life  
PPI: patient public involvement  
RAP: carer Review Advisory Panel  
CRT: Core Research Team  
RMG: Research Management Group

## **Plain language summary**

### **Background**

Family carers are crucial in supporting people nearing the end-of-life, but their own mental health may often suffer as a consequence. This project summarised what is known about what makes carers' mental health better or worse. Researchers worked with a carer Review Advisory Panel (RAP) to ensure that project findings were understandable and useful to carers.

### **Aims**

To report key findings on what made the teamwork between researchers and carers successful to help improve teamwork in other projects. To present carers' own recommendations on how to improve their mental health.

### **Process and principles**

Nine RAP meetings including 4-5 carers, a lay chair and three researchers were held. Important early preparation included getting to know each other and agreeing how to work together. Key meeting principles were (1) bringing carer voices to the fore by having a majority of carers and an experienced carer chair, (2) highlighting the value placed on meetings by having several researchers attend, including the project lead, (3) flexibility to include carers' own agenda and project changes, and (4) appropriate and prompt carer payment. Meetings had to adapt to online working due to Covid-19.

### **Outputs**

Carers' moved from being advisors to taking more initiative and producing their own carer recommendations, which became a main project output.

### **Reflection**

Written reflections by carers and researchers indicated that successful teamwork arose from a shared sense of purpose and gains, mutual commitment and respect, and bridging between researcher and carer perspectives through training, communication, negotiation and compromise. Early preparation helped the group adapt to challenges of online working. Carer representation on other project committees could have been improved.

### **Conclusion**

Project principles enabled good researcher-carer teamwork and produced valuable carer recommendation, but need proper investment in time and resources. Online working can be successful, but needs good face-to-face preparation.

## 1 Introduction

Patient and public involvement (PPI) in research has been defined as “research being carried out ‘with’ or ‘by’ members of the public rather than ‘to’, ‘about’ or ‘for’ them”.<sup>1</sup> The importance of involving patients, carers and members of the public in health research has long been recognised.<sup>2</sup> Such involvement can improve the quality, relevance and impact of research<sup>2</sup> by involving people who have direct, experiential knowledge of living with an illness and of being on the receiving end of services.<sup>2-4</sup> This brings different knowledge and expertise which can lead to greater insights than would be possible without PPI. Further, there is an ethical argument that people have a right to have a say in research that is likely to affect them and their care.<sup>2,4</sup>

PPI in systematic reviews is important to ensure relevance and meaning both to the people affected by a health condition or context and to people using the reviews to inform health policy and practice.<sup>5</sup> Benefits again include insights from first-hand experience, researchers and PPI members learning from each other, and improved relevance, communication and dissemination of findings.<sup>6</sup> PPI members may also gain new skills and confidence.<sup>7,8</sup>

This paper reports on PPI work with a carer Review Advisory Panel (RAP) in a meta synthesis of research on what might lead to, or prevent, poor mental health (e.g. anxiety, depression, stress) in carers who look after a family member or friend who is at end-of-life. Stage 1 of the project involved separate syntheses of the relevant qualitative,<sup>9</sup> observational quantitative<sup>10</sup> and intervention literature, integration of these reviews within a common framework<sup>11</sup>, and creation of draft project outputs. Stage 2 involved one-off workshops and focus groups with key stakeholders (carers, patients, practitioners, commissioners, policy makers) to help tailor contents and presentation of outputs to each stakeholder group.

The carer RAP provided PPI throughout Stages 1 and 2. The RAP PPI was a secondary focus of the project, albeit a very important one where continuous, meaningful involvement was sought. Their planned role in Stage 1 included review of project evidence and findings to see if they made sense to carers, how they could be meaningfully presented and combined into a common framework, and whether there were gaps to be addressed in further research; in Stage 2 they advised on consultation and dissemination. However, the role evolved over time as the RAP took more control over their contributions to produce carer-led recommendations from project findings. These recommendations became an important output in their own right alongside review findings.

RAP involvement was therefore initially limited to the roles of ‘Contributing’, where there is indirect influence over the review process, and ‘Influencing’, where there is direct influence on the review, but without direct control over decisions or the process.<sup>5</sup> Alternatively, the role could be summarised as ‘Consultation’.<sup>1,2</sup> However, the aim was to truly listen and be responsive to carers’ views, even if this took the project in new directions. The project therefore provided what Knowles et al<sup>3</sup> refer to as ‘space to talk’ and ‘space to change’. ‘Space to talk’ meant enabling shared dialogue and recognising carer and researcher expertise as equally valuable. ‘Space to change’ allowed for adaptation in response to carer feedback, both to the study and the way of working together.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, the RAP’s role evolved into becoming more ‘Controlling’, i.e. making decisions and controlling parts of the process<sup>5</sup> or approaching more genuine ‘Collaboration’ and co-production.<sup>1-3,12</sup> This evolution took place within the constraints imposed by the Covid pandemic, where involvement had to be adapted from face-to-face to remote working.

This paper aims to add to the limited literature on PPI in systematic reviews by reporting lessons learnt for creating space for genuine co-production within a tightly defined literature review project and achieving meaningful PPI in the context of remote working. It addresses a recognised need for

more transparent and critical reporting of PPI in research to progress beyond separate case studies and capture the impacts of PPI, improve the evidence base, encourage innovation and enable robust appraisal.<sup>4,8</sup> The GRIPP2 reporting checklists have been developed to help address this.<sup>13</sup> As PPI was a secondary focus of the project, our reporting is guided by the GRIPP2 Short Form.<sup>13</sup>

The aims of the project overall were to help improve mental health among carers during EOL through evidence-synthesis of factors related to carer mental health and translation of findings into accessible information for key stakeholders, to better target future efforts to improve carer mental health. The aims of PPI were to ensure study findings and outputs were relevant and accessible to carers themselves and reflected a carer perspective.

The aims of this paper are to present principles and components that facilitated successful PPI in an evidence synthesis project to help inform PPI in similar projects.<sup>13</sup> This includes presentation of:

- Methods in the form of the principles and processes applied to foster good PPI in the project
- Results in the form of outcomes from PPI in the study, particularly carer recommendations initiated and produced by the RAP
- Reflections by carers and researchers on what worked well and less well
- Discussion, including critical reflection on principles, remote working, PPI resourcing, and limitations

## **2 Methods: principles and processes applied**

### **2.1 Creating a carer Review Advisory Panel (RAP)**

The project included a carer co-applicant (JF) to ensure PPI in project design from the outset. JF had PPI experience as an advisor on the Public and Community Involvement and Engagement (PCIE) Panel of the NIHR Applied Research Collaboration Greater Manchester (ARC GM). Co-applicants highlighted the need for a carer Review Advisory Panel (RAP) within the design to ensure the carer voice was a central part of the project.<sup>5,14</sup> This would facilitate carers being involved in all stages of the project, including input into the search terms to identify relevant literature, analysing the qualitative data, ensuring that interpretation and synthesis of findings remained grounded in carers' experience and concerns, and that dissemination materials were understandable and meaningful from the carers' perspective.

The recruitment process aimed to ensure potential RAP members had a clear understanding of what they were being invited to do.<sup>1,6</sup> Plain English recruitment adverts and further information for carers interested in becoming involved were developed with JF and another carer on the PCIE Panel of ARC GM. These covered project aims, the role of the RAP and how it would work, who could apply and how. Detailed documents were also provided on Terms of Reference, including RAP member role description, and Payment Policy.

Both open and targeted recruitment strategies were employed<sup>5</sup> to ensure wide reach. The project was advertised widely through Twitter with links to project webpage information. Further, local carer support groups were identified and emailed flyers and further information. In a second recruitment drive KB followed up with additional emails and phone calls and located and contacted additional relevant groups. Finally, potential candidates known to JF were contacted directly.<sup>1,5</sup>

To help ascertain eligibility and ensure equitable access and diversity in the composition of the RAP, all candidates completed a brief application form, either through email, paper document or online survey. The project aimed to recruit six RAP members who varied in terms of age, sex, ethnicity, experiences of caring for patients with different conditions and experience of PPI.<sup>1</sup> A selection



process protocol was set up to shortlist applicants and conduct interviews to identify the final RAP membership. However, as there was only a small number of applicants (eight), KB conducted informal telephone conversations with all to check their understanding of the project and ability to commit to regular meetings, and to gain information on demographics, background of caring and PPI. This information was anonymised, tabulated and mapped to the recruitment criteria to identify the candidates who represented the widest range of carer experiences, e.g. five of the candidates were men, of whom three were selected to ensure gender balance. The resulting group had balanced numbers of males and females, ethnic minority community representation, included carers of people with cancer or non-cancer diagnoses, with long term or shorter term experience of caregiving, and ranging from extensive PPI experience to none.

Pre-RAP preparation and relationship building was facilitated by KB and TS through individual face to face meetings with the selected RAP members to explain what was required of the role in more detail<sup>1,5,14</sup> and give carers an opportunity to tell their story. This proved extremely beneficial in building researcher-carer relationships, so carers felt comfortable and able to contribute when attending their first RAP meeting. Unfortunately, the carer from the ethnic minority community stepped back before the first RAP meeting due to personal circumstances, leaving a total of five RAP members. A second carer stepped back towards the end of the project, as the role evolved to be more demanding, but was still able to make a substantial contribution.

## **2.2 Meeting principles, formats and processes**

The RAP met nine times in total. Table 1 provides an outline of the meetings and their content. Below we outline the principles that guided the meetings (see Box 1 for summary).

**Table 1: List of carer Review Advisory Panel (RAP) meetings**

RAP Meeting (Date)	Content
RAP 1 (11 February 2020)	<p><b>Introduction to the project.</b> Core objectives: Introduce research team; Develop some ways of working; Provide an overview of the project; Define Patient and Public Involvement (PPI) and role of Research Advisory Panel members; Introduction to health research and systematic reviews; clarify PPI payment policy.</p>
RAP 2 (28 April 2020)	<p><b>Training session for the carer advisory role: analysis of papers for the qualitative review</b> Core objectives: Introduction to using Zoom; Define qualitative research; Introduction to systematic reviews – a recap; Aims of qualitative systematic review – a recap; Define role of carer advisor; Introduction to analysis techniques: coding data from selected qualitative papers; Outline the analysis task: to analyse three qualitative research papers and summarise the findings.</p>
RAP 3 (15 June 2020)	<p><b>Feedback session for carer advisors: discussion of themes arising from analysis of three qualitative research papers</b> Core objectives: To discuss the themes identified by both carer advisors and research team and identify first order construct themes from the qualitative literature that makes sense to carers.</p>
RAP 4 (30 July 2020)	<p><b>Presentation and discussion of preliminary quantitative observational review findings and overall qualitative findings</b> Core objectives: Introduction to quantitative research – a recap; Aims of observational review – a recap; Overview and discussion of preliminary observational review findings; Overview and discussion on the most helpful ways of presenting numerical findings (including results of meta-analysis); Overview and discussion of the overall themes from the qualitative review.</p>
RAP 5 (1 October 2020)	<p><b>Presentation and discussion of final quantitative observational review findings</b> Core objectives: Introduction to quantitative research– brief recap; Aims of observational review – brief recap; Observational review process – brief recap; Overview and discussion of final observational review findings.</p>
RAP 6 (26 November 2020)	<p><b>Presentation and discussion of ‘the pulling together’ of the observational review and qualitative review findings.</b> Core objectives: Presentation and discussion of different levels of information; Presentation and discussion of overarching map of themes; Presentation and discussion of overarching map of themes mapped on to psychological models of stress and strains of caregiving.</p>
RAP 7 (28 January 2021)	<p><b>Presentation and discussion of intervention review findings</b> Core objectives: Overview and discussion of intervention review findings; Introduction to making recommendations from the research evidence.</p>
RAP 8 (25 February 2021)	<p><b>Developing Recommendations</b> Core objectives: Developing recommendations from the overall research evidence.</p>
RAP 9 (15 July 2021)	<p><b>Project update, feedback on stakeholder consultation and discussion of project outputs</b> Core objectives: Project update; Feedback on stakeholder consultation; Seek views on involvement in project outputs (E.g. podcasts, leaflets/booklets/posters and formal reports/publications); Finalise recommendations; Organise end of project get-together.</p>

### **Box 1: Principles for working with the carer Review Advisory Panel (RAP)**

#### Recruitment

- Clear information on what potential RAP members were invited to do
- A range of recruitment strategies, both open and targeted, for a broad reach
- Application form (which several response options: paper, e-mail, online) and a selection process protocol to help ascertain eligibility and ensure equitable access and diversity in PPI group

#### Preparation

- Individual meetings between RAP members and researchers prior to RAP meetings to prepare RAP members and build researcher-carer relationships
- First RAP meeting focusing on 1) relationship building within whole group; 2) agreeing how to work together; 3) clarifying expectations; and 4) training in basic concepts

#### Ongoing principles

- RAP meeting principles
  - a majority of carers at meetings to ensure carers were comfortable to express views
  - substantial researcher representation, including the project lead, to highlight value placed on RAP meetings
  - a Chair with both carer and PPI experience, to ensure carer voices remained at the fore
  - space to follow carers' agenda, giving carers 'space to talk' about aspects outside the scheduled agenda and providing a 'space to change' project materials, processes and outputs in response to carer feedback
- Appropriate and prompt payment, including preparation work and reimbursement for travel
- Ongoing communication
  - proactive contact with RAP members by email outside meetings
  - writing up and circulating carer feedback to ensure it had been properly understood
  - providing an alternative channel for raising carer concerns through the Chair
  - ensuring RAP members saw how their input made a difference
- Ample time for carers to prepare for meetings with clear instructions
- Ongoing training, including new material and refreshing of previous material

Appropriate resourcing throughout to make the above principles possible

#### **2.2.1 Starting up principles**

The first face-to-face meeting (three hours) was essential in laying the foundations for the RAP collaboration and building trust. It focused on the core principles of 1) relationship building; 2) agreeing how to work together; 3) clarifying expectations; and 4) training.<sup>1,5,14</sup> First, time and space to socialise and share experiences was factored at the beginning, during and end of the meeting. Second, ways of working together was the first core agenda item, with both researchers and carers contributing to generating a list. This included: keeping personal information confidential, treating others with respect, and establishing that 'there are no silly questions' (Box 2 shows the agreed list). Third, the group discussed what the RAP carers could expect from the project itself (its content and

aims), and what they could expect from the research team. This included a good working relationship based on mutual trust and respect, clear information on what the team were asking of them, feedback on how their contribution was making a difference, and a contact outside meetings for queries and support. Then, to help define carers' role within the project, the researchers presented general principles of PPI and asked carers to discuss informally (during the break) what they expected to gain from the project. The group then talked through what it was hoped the RAP could contribute to the project, including helping to make sense of the evidence, communicating findings to others, and identifying problems with the project and potential solutions. Finally, introductory training in systematic reviews, qualitative and quantitative research was provided. A 'jargon buster' list was started to define academic terms that carers were unsure of.<sup>1,14</sup>

#### **Box 2: Ground rules for ways of working**

1. Any personal information is confidential and will not be shared outside the group
2. There are no silly questions
3. Everyone is valued
4. Observe personal boundaries
5. Everyone will be respected when talking
6. Deal with differences of opinion or conflicts in a calm and professional way
7. No racist, homophobic or sexist comments
8. All jargon will be explained (unfamiliar words to be added to a 'jargon buster' dictionary).
9. The agenda is used only as a guide to allow discussions to flow

### **2.2.2 Ongoing meeting principles**

To ensure carer voices were heard and valued the project focused on composition and chairing of the RAP meetings and space to follow carers' agenda. It also followed recommended principles for appropriate payment, training, preparation and communication.<sup>1,5</sup>

#### RAP meeting composition: carer majority and researcher commitment

RAP meetings comprised five to six carer members, including the Chair, and three researchers. The aim was that carers should be regarded as partners, feel free to express their views and be valued. To facilitate this, carers formed the majority group and researchers the minority group at meetings, so carers could more easily support each other and express their views. However, to highlight the importance of the RAP to the project there was substantial researcher representation, with the Principal Investigator always one of the researchers present.

#### The RAP Chair should be a carer

It was considered crucial to have a carer chair the RAP rather than a researcher. This gave a signal that carers' views were at the fore and that their input was valued equally to that of the researchers. However, it was also important to ensure this carer had chairing experience and felt confident and comfortable in the role, and to help ensure meetings were run efficiently and effectively. Consequently, JF was asked if she was willing to take on the chairing, given her familiarity with the project as the carer representative on the project Research Management Team (RMG) and her previous PPI experience. JF agreed, but requested the role be properly defined so there was clarity regarding the expectations of her role as RAP Chair and how this would be combined with her RMG role. A member of the research team liaised with the Chair before meetings to review each meeting's aims and how best to conduct them and ensure the Chair was up to date with project

developments. During meetings the Chair ensured carers' views remained at the fore and that all carer members were encouraged to participate in discussions<sup>1</sup>.

#### Space to follow carers' agenda

Although all meetings had a clear meeting agenda, it served as a guide rather than a fixed structure for meetings, to encourage RAP members to express their perspectives freely and allow discussion to flow productively. This facilitated the principles of 'space to talk' and 'space to change'.<sup>3</sup> If carers began to explore aspects outside the scheduled agenda or materials, the meeting would follow these discussions through and then consider how they informed the project as a whole. This may only involve changes to project materials, but sometimes it had implications for future PPI work, which was then flagged and negotiated (see Results). Having a clear agenda, however, helped ensure core scheduled items were still returned to and addressed in the course of the meetings.

#### Proper and prompt payment

Project policy was to pay RAP members for time spent at the RAP meetings and time preparing for meetings, including analysis.<sup>1,5,15</sup> However, RAP members decided themselves whether they wanted payment or not, and whether in money or voucher form. Members were also reimbursed for any travel costs. The initial aim was to pay participants in cash at the end of each meeting, so there would be no delay in payment.<sup>3</sup> However, Covid and a move to online working meant this was only possible for the first and only face-to-face meeting. Payment thereafter was via bank transfer managed through the University claim form system.

Initially higher pay rates were applied for meeting attendance than for meeting preparation. However, as RAP members were set tasks prior to meetings, or at least were required to engage closely with meeting materials, the effort involved in meeting preparation became more similar to that of the meetings themselves. The project therefore changed to a flat, high rate for all hours spent and an added a £5 fee per online meeting to cover members' internet connection.<sup>15</sup>

#### Enabling RAP members to prepare

Before each meeting it was important that RAP members knew what they were being asked to do, what the meeting agenda and contents were, and that they had time to consider the meeting materials.<sup>1,7</sup> Meeting documents and slides were therefore sent well in advance, in each RAP member's preferred format (electronic or paper), allowing at least a week to review materials and prepare.

#### Ongoing training

Training was an ongoing component of meetings.<sup>1,6,7</sup> The training included general introductions to health research, systematic reviews and qualitative and quantitative research, accompanied by more in depth cover of qualitative reviews, qualitative analysis techniques and coding of data with illustrative template(s), and similarly, quantitative review processes and presentation of numerical findings. Meetings covered both new materials and repetition of training related to previous meetings as required, to ensure members were familiar with or 'refreshed' regarding methods and concepts to be discussed (see Table 1 for contents of each meeting). Templates with examples were provided for tasks. Questions were always welcomed and efforts were made to avoid jargon:<sup>7</sup> any new terms were added to the list of 'Jargon buster' definitions.

#### Ongoing communication

The project followed the following principles for good communication:<sup>5,7</sup> 1) maintaining proactive contact with RAP members by email so they felt supported, rather than wait for them to come to researchers for questions; 2) ensuring RAP feedback had been properly understood, by writing up and circulating feedback to ensure it captured what carers wanted to say; 3) providing an alternative

channel for raising concerns, by encouraging RAP members to contact the Chair after meetings regarding any concerns or suggestions for improvement, which were fed back anonymously to researchers, as appropriate; 4) ensuring RAP members saw how their input made a difference,<sup>6</sup> through meeting updates, participation in Stage 2 stakeholder meetings and a post-project meeting.

### **2.2.3 Adaptations in response to Covid**

After the first face-to-face meeting the project had to adapt to online meetings due to Covid restrictions. This was a challenge for some carers who had not used Zoom before or who had to borrow a computer to join the group. KB tested Zoom with each member before the first online meeting to ensure everyone would be able to link up. Still one member was unable to activate their camera. As Zoom meetings can be more taxing than face to face, meetings had to become shorter (2 hours max, including a break) and therefore also more structured, with more emphasis on pre-meeting preparation. However, flexibility to let meetings follow the flow of the group discussion was retained, and the group continued to work well.

## **3 Results: outputs in the form of RAP contributions to the project**

### **3.1 RAP involvement as planned**

The RAP made the following contributions set out in the original project aims: reviewing the search strategy; contributing to qualitative review analysis; reviewing findings and helping shape the presentation of findings; considering how findings may fit together within a comprehensive framework; supporting the Stage 2 stakeholder consultation; and reviewing final project products (dissemination materials and reporting). Some further details are outlined below.

Importantly, the RAP ensured the content of the synthesis was meaningful. They were central in ensuring that the qualitative literature synthesis identified factors associated with carer mental health and grouped them into themes that were meaningful from carers' perspective.<sup>9</sup> The main themes were 'Patient condition', 'Impact of caring responsibilities', 'Finances', 'Relationships', 'Carer internal processes', and 'Support'. Findings from the subsequent quantitative observational and intervention syntheses were then mapped onto these themes (and an added theme of 'Contextual factors'). The RAP reviewed whether the sub-themes to these main themes made sense to carers and whether anything was missing. One clear gap identified by the RAP was the lack of consideration of the impact of financial factors on carer wellbeing within the quantitative literature.<sup>10</sup> Additional missing components were identifying as a 'carer', loss of own identity, and limited consideration of ethnicity. Further, whilst the quantitative literature labelled some coping strategies as 'dysfunctional' or maladaptive, RAP members considered these as potentially helpful strategies in some circumstances, in the moment and in context of an individual's caregiving situation. Rather than labelling coping strategies as 'dysfunctional' or 'functional', it was felt that these should be judgement free and simply presented as coping strategies found to be associated with 'better', 'worse' or 'no change' to carer mental health within the literature.<sup>10</sup>

The RAP also advised on the presentation format of the findings. This included presentation of numerical data using colour coded columns to highlight the number of investigations showing that a factor was associated with worse carer mental health (red), better carer mental health (green), or showed no association (neutral colour).<sup>10</sup> Further, RAP members advised on how the total body of evidence could be organised into different levels of detail to enable stakeholders to first gain an overview of findings, and then find the detailed content relevant to them (further detail will be reported elsewhere).

Finally, the RAP contributed to Stage 2 where ‘products’ from syntheses were presented to other stakeholders for feedback (additional carers, patients, practitioners, commissioners, policy makers). RAP advised on how to involve additional carers. Further, five RAP members including the Chair wanted to be involved in the Stage 2 workshops and discussion groups, either as active participants or as observers. Four participated in the four online workshops with carers, practitioners, and commissioners/policy makers as participant (the Chair) or observers, and four RAP members each participated in one of two online discussion groups with GPs and carers. Further details about the Stage 2 consultation and products will be reported elsewhere [Synopsis paper]. Three RAP members agreed to feed back on the qualitative synthesis report<sup>9</sup> and all members contributed to the current paper through participation in reflection on RAP involvement and paper review.

### **3.2 Changes to the project plan**

The ‘space to talk’ within the project introduced perspectives beyond the original plan which were then accommodated through ‘space to change’.<sup>3</sup> This led to greater RAP involvement in the qualitative review analysis, using a simplified framework to organise findings, and most importantly, the addition of carer recommendations to the project ‘products’.

The RAP’s wish to be involved in the analysis and to develop recommendations expanded the number of meetings from the planned six meetings to nine in total. The added resources required to cover additional RAP hours and project time were aided by cost savings in moving from face to face to online activities. We outline project changes further below.

#### Whole group engagement in qualitative synthesis

The initial plan, introduced in Meeting 1, was for the qualitative data extraction and analysis to be conducted by KB and one or two carer co-analysts. However, RAP members decided that they would all like to contribute to data extraction and/or analysis as a group. Three members of the group agreed to conduct data extraction and then the group as a whole discussed the themes that emerged from the data.

To accommodate a change to whole group analysis, KB delivered training on qualitative research methods in Meeting 2 and recapped the systematic review training. The RAP members were given three papers (10% of total) and asked to consider the results of papers, identify sections that described things that affected carers’ mental health and write notes on the themes and subthemes within these. They also got questions to help them think about themes and a template for recording thoughts on themes.<sup>7,9</sup> All received the same papers, selected for maximum variation and clarity and completed data extraction in their own time. KB collated findings and these were then discussed at Meeting 3. The fourth RAP meeting continued to focus on the qualitative meta synthesis. KB presented the themes and subthemes she had identified from the three papers and the group discussed similarities and differences between the themes identified by the carers, how the findings related to the carers’ experiences and what themes they believed were missing (see Bayliss et al)<sup>9</sup>.

#### Simplified framework for organising findings

The project originally aimed to use existing psychological models of factors affecting carers’ mental health<sup>16-18</sup> as a framework for final organisation and presentation of findings for stakeholders in stage 2. However, work with the RAP on a potential, updated model suggested that this may not aid presentation, and that a simple presentation of themes would be as helpful (and less confusing). In particular, RAP members felt the perspective on caregiving from models was too linear, and did not reflect the dynamic nature of caregiving, the continuous interaction between themes and the relationship and interaction between patient and carer. Further, they felt this perspective implied that negative mental health outcomes were inevitable despite strategies to improve mental health,

and a more positive picture was required. What was important to communicate to other stakeholders was the themes themselves and evidence that they were likely to affect carer mental health. As the models were not seen as helpful in communication of findings, the project thereafter focused on presenting findings as meaningfully as possible for each theme, rather than pursuing the models further.

#### Development of carer recommendations

The most important development was that the RAP decided they wanted to produce carer recommendations from the project. Originally, the project aim was solely to synthesise and present findings in ways that were meaningful to carers, and then use stakeholder engagement in Stage 2 to help make the presentation of findings more accessible and useful to different stakeholder groups. Then it would be for stakeholders themselves to consider what actions may follow from findings (e.g. for practitioners, what direct support may be given in consultations; for commissioners, what services were important to fund; for policy makers, what policy changes may help; for carer organisations, how best to target support of their carers). However, RAP members felt this left a notable gap in the project. They believed it was important to consider what findings told us about the support carers needed and for the RAP to produce recommendations on how to support carers that could be presented to other stakeholders alongside the findings themselves.

To enable this a seventh RAP meeting January 2021 included discussion of how project findings could be used to develop recommendations for improving carer mental health, and some initial recommendations emerged at this meeting. Next, an additional February meeting was held to develop further recommendations. Before this meeting RAP members requested a recap of total project findings and reflected on what actions could be taken within each theme to improve mental health for carers. Questions to consider included: what factors could or may be changed, what would be considered as priorities for change, how services could be changed (gold standard/ minimum standard), and how factors that cannot be changed could help to identify carers who need added support. The RAP feedback, both from the January and February meetings, were synthesised by TS and reviewed by RAP members and the research team via email.

Table 2 presents the final RAP-developed recommendations to support carers to maintain or improve their mental health. These are divided into 'Overarching principles' which refer to recommendations which extended across all seven project themes, and 'Theme specific' recommendations that seemed to fit with individual themes from the research evidence (see Supplement 1 for full details. Further summaries and resources can be found on the project website: <https://arc-gm.nihr.ac.uk/the-carer-project-outputs>).

The RAP highlighted that these recommendations should be seen within the context of key considerations for carers overall (see Supplement 1). Firstly, that recommendations were based on making it as easy as possible for the carer to fulfil their role and "removing obstacles which might stop them being a better carer", including removing or reducing unnecessary demands on their time to allow more time to look after the person cared for. The RAP noted that it may have significant impact on carer's mental health if they felt they "might not be offering the optimum care". Secondly, the RAP stressed the importance of carers feeling empowered, having their voices heard, and having proper engagement with services as active participants within their caregiving role. Further, recommendations focused on overcoming common challenges experienced by end-of-life carers that may help to support the mental health of the majority, however it should be recognised that experiences of individual carers will vary and that 'one size does not fit all'. The RAP also recognised the need to be pragmatic in their recommendations based on limits of what services can provide. Recommendations therefore focused on what may realistically be changed, rather than representing an ideal 'gold standard'. The RAP mainly focused on developing recommendations that spanned



themes and reflected the whole of the end-of-life caregiving journey (including post-bereavement), as trying to fit recommendations to the seven specific themes from the research evidence was often difficult.

**Table 2: Summary of Recommendations from the carer Review Advisory Panel (RAP) (see Supplement 1 for full details)**

Overarching principles	Theme specific recommendations
<p><b>1) Awareness raising</b></p> <p>Many good services exist but are not effectively communicated to carers in an timely manner in ways that meet their needs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make carers aware of the support services available to them or the person they are caring for</li> <li>• Raise awareness among health care professionals of the need to address the impact of end of life caregiving on carers</li> </ul>	<p><b>1) Patient condition</b></p> <p>Carers are likely to experience better mental health if the following are in place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accessible and timely information about the patient’s end-of-life condition</li> <li>• Control of the patients’ symptoms</li> <li>• Recognition that palliative patients may have other conditions that are still treatable, e.g. requiring dentists and opticians, that require continued referral and accessibility</li> <li>• Holistic approach to patients’ treatment and care</li> <li>• Co-ordinated and continuous, rather than fragmented, patient care: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Carers should not need to tell their ‘story’ repeatedly. They may be helped by having a folder with all relevant patient information that can be taken to appointments</li> <li>○ Provision should not depend on where the carer lives</li> <li>○ Patients should be able to see the same GP over the course of end-of-life care</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>2) Road Map to support carers to navigate the end-of-life caregiving journey</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide carers with a ‘road map’ with all the relevant information to prepare and support them to navigate each stage of end of life caregiving and bereavement. This needs to be holistic and include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Information on what help is available locally</li> <li>○ Information on how to access specialist equipment and services for the patient at home</li> <li>○ Practical advice, including legal advice and making a Power of Attorney; financial advice; service advice</li> <li>○ Lists of useful telephone numbers, websites, and email addresses</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>2) Impact of Caring Responsibilities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carers should be able to spend quality time with the person they are caring for and have sufficient time for caregiving, and their own concerns. Helping carers with coordination, administration and navigation through the stages of end-of-life caregiving would help free up their time and reduce the impact of caring responsibilities.</li> </ul>
<p><b>3) Bespoke support which recognises the carer has needs and identifies them through assessment</b></p> <p>This should reflect that carers’ needs are holistic, and support should be tailored where possible to the needs and situation of individual carers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service providers should recognise that carers have needs and use appropriate tools to assess them</li> <li>• Needs assessment should be comprehensive, include assessment of medical, personal and social needs, and take into account the carer’s actual needs, rather than just what services can offer</li> </ul>	<p><b>3) Finances</b></p> <p>This was a fundamental issue that overlaps with overall recommendations for Practical considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Carers should not be financially disadvantaged by their caregiving role. They need as an absolute minimum sufficient finances (e.g. through a decent carers allowance) to ensure basic needs are met, including ability to pay rent, bills and ‘put a decent meal on the table’</li> <li>• Carers should have access to practical advice, including early legal and financial advice, including Power of Attorney, will making and Do Not Resuscitate where appropriate</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Services should take into account the carer's personal circumstances</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carers should receive timely advice on their eligibility for funding for care costs, including their eligibility for a housing adaption grant</li> </ul>
<p><b>4) Standardized comprehensive assessment to assess 'actual' rather than 'managed' needs of the patient</b> To help ensure that the person cared for receives the support they need, carers' role in achieving this is understood, and carers feel able to manage caregiving tasks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Patients should be assessed for their 'actual' needs as opposed to their 'managed' needs, to make visible all the support the carer provides, ensure the assessment does not conclude that the patient is more capable than they really are, and that their dependency on the carer's support is fully recognised</li> <li>Assessment should be standardized across services and provide a comprehensive assessment of the patient's actual needs</li> </ul>	<p><b>4) Relationships</b> While acknowledging that carers may vary in their feelings about being a carer and in the quality of the patient-carer relationship:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carers should be enabled to spend adequate time with the patient. Easing navigation through each stage of the journey of caregiving would take pressure off carers and free up time for them to do so</li> </ul>
<p><b>5) Coordinated and timely care by providing a single point of contact for the carer</b> Carers do not necessarily know how to navigate the health and social care system, and will need support in articulating their specific needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide carer access to a key worker as a single point of contact, to ensure patient care is timely, continuous, and that care of both the carer and the person they are caring for is coordinated. This support should extend to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comprehensive assessment of needs</li> <li>Helping carers with administrative tasks e.g. filling in necessary forms</li> <li>Signposting and/or referral to the relevant services</li> <li>Follow up by relevant services, including post bereavement.</li> <li>Advocacy support to help carers articulate what they need</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p><b>5) Carer Internal Processes</b> Recognising that some carers may need 'permission' to feel the way they feel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carers need to have an outlet for 'venting emotions'</li> </ul>
<p><b>6) Practical considerations/Essential Resources:</b> This needs to take into account that carers have to self-declare to be recognised as a carer, which some find difficult; that they may not live in the same household as the person cared for; and that time is of the essence for end-of-life caregiving. As a minimum:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carers need to feel safe in the knowledge that their basic physical needs will be met, both during end of life caregiving and post-bereavement</li> <li>Carers should not be financially disadvantaged by their caregiving role and need sufficient finances for basic needs (see Finances)</li> </ul>	<p><b>6) Support</b> (a) Recommendations about support for the patient Given that carers are more likely to experience better mental health when the cared for person receives the care and support they need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support for patients should be readily available, responsive, accessible and flexible <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With the option of receiving support at home or close to home wherever possible</li> <li>With home care services flexible and responsive to the patient's needs, including timing of visits</li> </ul> </li> <li>Joint support should be available the carer and the person cared for if that is their preference</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equipment for the patient should be easily accessible and timely provided, not when the patient no longer requires it. Equipment should be retrieved promptly and sensitively following death.</li> <li>• Carers should have access to practical advice, including legal and financial advice (see Finances)</li> <li>• Carers should be given timely advice on their eligibility for funding for care costs (see Finances)</li> </ul>	<p>(b) Recommendations about support for the carer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service providers should recognise that carers have needs and use appropriate tools to assess them. Assessment should be comprehensive and take account of the carer’s actual needs, not just what services can offer</li> <li>• Individual formal carer support should be available. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Carers should be able to receive general counselling if they need a safe space to ‘vent’</li> <li>○ Carers should be permitted to remain in the system post-bereavement for bereavement counselling and other support services</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Individual informal carer support should be available <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Carers should have early access to local support/ peer support groups, which may also help identify further sources of help/support</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	<p><b>7) Contextual factors</b>  All recommendations should take into account the specific context, personal circumstances and preferences of individual carers, wherever possible</p>

#### 4 Carers’ and researchers’ reflections on RAP involvement

Feedback was sought from RAP members and researchers to gain insights into their perspectives on RAP involvement. An independent research project into the RAP involvement was not part of the original project protocol, but it was considered important to gain feedback from those involved to reflect on lessons learnt to inform PPI in future reviews. As such, this should be considered a collective reflective piece, rather than a research based evaluation, as the RAP members and researchers who provided the feedback are also the authors of this paper.

##### 4.1 Method

Feedback was collected from RAP members and researchers via email, using open ended questions and written responses. Box 3 shows the questions asked. These were distributed to all RAP members and core research team (CRT) members. Respondents were all final RAP members including the Chair (n=5), CRT members who worked directly with the RAP (n=4/5), and CRT members not directly involved with the RAP (n=2/4). In the findings reported below each respondent is allocated the ID codes RAP1-5, CRT1-4 and CRT 5-6, respectively.

### **Box 3: Reflection Questions**

Questions for RAP members:

1. Briefly, what is your prior experience of patient and public involvement (PPI)?
2. What were your expectations of being involved in this project?
3. How did the experience of being involved match-up to your expectations?
4. What did you gain?
5. What did you give?
6. What worked well?
7. What didn't work so well?
8. What would you say to other people, like yourself, about working on a similar project?
9. What were the challenges of completing this project during the COVID 19 pandemic/ how did you cope with it?

Questions for Core Research Team members who worked directly with the RAP:

1. Briefly, what is your prior experience of patient and public involvement and engagement (PPIE)?
2. What were your expectations for working with a carer RAP on this project?
3. What have been the gains for this project of the RAP involvement?
4. What have you gained or learnt from the RAP involvement personally or in your work?
5. Were there any challenges that you faced or had to solve of working with a RAP in general?
6. What were the challenges of working with a RAP during the COVID 19 pandemic/ how did you solved it?

Questions for the rest of the Core Research Team:

1. What have been benefits for this project that have resulted from working with a carer RAP?
2. Have there been any challenges for this project when involving a carer RAP?

KB and GG initially reviewed the collated materials from RAP and researcher respondents. Based on this it was agreed that the material could broadly be organised into a framework of what made PPI work well or not so well. GG then worked through materials, writing freehand notes on contents and then considered how contents fitted the framework. Comments were next indexed according to the broad themes of what made the RAP involvement work and what were challenges. All materials relevant to a theme were collated for further in-depth scrutiny of any subthemes and how carer and researcher views compared or contrasted. The comments and resulting themes were reviewed in full by CR and revisions made. Finally, all researchers and RAP members who had commented reviewed the resulting draft document to assess if this had captured their perspectives. Thereafter some further RAP feedback was incorporated in the final text and final adjustments to subthemes made.

## **4.2 Findings**

### **4.2.1 What made PPI work well**

Reflections mainly focused on what made the PPI work well: a shared sense of gains to the project from PPI; personal gain; mutual commitment and respect; and meaningful bridging between academic and lay perspectives.

### Gains to the project from PPI

RAP members and researchers seemed to have a shared sense of the purpose of the RAP involvement, which is likely to have helped them work together effectively.

All the RAP members hoped that their involvement could contribute insights into carers' experience and make a difference in supporting other carers.

*"To share what I learned from being an end of life carer for my late wife with a view to improving carer experiences"* (RAP1)

*"I thought my experiences may prove of some use for other carers."* (RAP2)

Some also indicated the value of PPI in 'shaking up' the agenda or focus of researchers and clinicians.

*"... to be involved in research which had the potential to affect real peoples' lives rather than just project research papers for clinicians and academics."* (RAP5)

*"We will never find the right answers until we find out what the problems really are, not what professionals think they might or should be."* (RAP3)

The researchers' comments mirrored RAP members' perspectives. Firstly, in the value of having carers' experience informing the project:

*"...the RAP would be able to offer rich insights and perspectives of the carer experience and offer context to research findings using their lived experience."* (CRT4)

Secondly, how carers' would help the project achieve its aim of making a difference to carers:

*"It is important that the findings make sense from a carers' perspective and resonate with their experience. If the project loses touch with carers' reality, it is less likely to achieve its aims."* (CRT2)

Finally, how the RAP may be able to challenge existing research and provide new insights:

*"... some of the key findings from the RAP group, such as financial difficulties and stressors were interesting to see considering many of the trials and observational studies had not assessed these outcomes."* (CRT6)

*"I expected it to be a valuable contribution that would take us out of some of our academic ways of thinking and give us new insights."* (CRT2)

*"...the recommendations were not on anyone's radar at the start of the project, I don't think but are such a valuable output."* (CRT3)

Researchers also noted the positives of being challenged by the RAP within the project:

*"It was also a nice way to be held accountable too in some ways."* (CRT3)

### Personal gain

Comments also reflected a sense of personal gain from PPI involvement, which may have sustained the commitment to PPI by both parties.

All the RAP members stressed learning as a personal gain. This included learning about other carers' experiences:

*"I also realised the various dynamics at play in caring, the varying levels of intensity that I suppose must exist..."* (RAP2)

*"A deeper understanding of the issues experienced across different carers."* (RAP4)

However, learning about research or technical aspects was also mentioned:

*"Gained some helpful insights into the preparation of a research paper."* (RAP5)

*"...I have a little more understanding of how qualitative research is conducted and hope to use this as a base to improve my knowledge in the future."* (RAP3)

RAP members also mentioned gaining from increased self-awareness, meeting people or having a sense of purpose through the Covid pandemic:

*"... I realised all the anxiety, stress, anger and guilt I had encountered over those seven years..." (RAP2)*

*"Met some interesting people" (RAP5)*

*"I felt useful during a time that most people were finding challenging." (RAP3)*

While researchers said less about personal gain from PPI, they noted a gain in learning, both in terms of understanding carers:

*"I have gained a greater understanding of how it feels to care for those at the end of life that cannot be gained by reading papers." (CRT1)*

and insights into the overall benefits of PPI:

*"As mostly a quantitative researcher, I have become more aware of the importance of PPI..." (CRT6)*

### Mutual commitment and respect

Comments indicated that both researchers and RAP members were committed to the project and that this commitment was acknowledged by both parties:

*"... We had a good group of engaged individuals who were determined to see their work through." (RAP5)*

*"The amount of work the researchers did was amazing and I can only praise them for their professionalism." (RAP2)*

In working together, there was clear mutual respect expressed by both groups:

*"... we were lucky to have a very constructive, reflective and positive (RAP) group where everybody contributed and everyone was focused on the aims of the project, to make sure it would benefit carers." (CRT2)*

*"It was a great (research) project the team were so thoughtful and accommodating and I think we have produced a high quality product." (RAP4)*

An integral component of respect for the RAP was that their views were taken seriously and that they had meaningful involvement:

*"I felt we were involved quite significantly throughout the process and our opinion was given due consideration." (RAP3)*

Payment was noted by RAP members as an important, tangible signal that RAP perspectives mattered:

*"Being paid for your time and effort is for me a marker that consultation is being taken seriously and is not just a box ticking exercise. I was very impressed that the University gave us the option of being taxed or not, that was very accommodating of them." (RAP3)*

### Bridging between academic and lay perspectives

Core to meaningful PPI involvement is bridging between academic and lay perspectives. This involved communicating research perspectives to carers, ensuring carers were able to meaningfully comment and have their perspectives heard, and negotiation and compromise between the two perspectives.

Enabling lay members to engage meaningfully with 'academic' materials can often pose a challenge and requires effort by both parties:

*"I was slightly worried about how well they would be able to work with the large volumes of synthesis data we would be producing – it was going to be a difficult balance between maintaining a high standard of reporting true to the findings while making it accessible to a lay person" (CRT3)*

*"... The arrangement of the themes was quite complicated and it took me a few meetings to get the hang of it. This was clearly the bulk of the work, and the researchers had no doubt*

*spent many hours working out how to best present the evidence, but it was a lot of information to assimilate at once. ... (RAP3)*

The investment in training, time and guidance were important means to overcome this:

*“Developing training that would be accessible and delivered in plain English, identifying support and training needs from the start.... Providing enough time and resources for the carers to be meaningfully involved... (and for analysis) Provide an example of how to feedback on a thematic analysis using a template, as lay members can vary greatly in how they interpret a task and provide feedback” (CRT1).*

Practical details also mattered in ensuring RAP had time and opportunity to prepare feedback:

*“We were given copies of slides and documents in plenty of time for the next meeting, in digital and paper form so we always had an opportunity to study them at leisure. Paper documents are important if you need to refer to them during a meeting and printing them off yourself can be quite expensive if they are very colourful....” (RAP3)*

Further, it was central that RAP members felt able to express their perspectives to researchers during meetings. Crucial to this was a feeling that carers and researchers were equal partners.

*“I think the project worked because of the mutual respect between the RAP and researchers, people were listened to and ideas were debated and modified if necessary.” (RAP2)*

*“Obviously carers were usually in larger numbers in the RAP meetings, but I believed that irrespective of that each individual (whether they be a researcher or carer) were on an equal par ...” (RAP5)*

This may have been facilitated by having a carer as Chair:

*“To help the carers feel more comfortable to express their views we had a lay chair.”(CRT1)*

However, core to making this work was a willingness by both parties to value different forms of knowledge and engage in negotiation and compromise in straddling the academic and lay world.

*“.. I think that PPI contributors and researchers can be working with different ideas about the value of different evidence - e.g. carers' experiences can seem anecdotal to researchers and researchers' preoccupations can seem just irrelevant to PPI partners. But I don't think that happened here. ...” (CRT5)*

*“... we were coming at the issues from different standpoints. Practically to produce meaningful joint work, compromise is essential and I think we would probably find each group felt that we gave ground.... We, in the RAP meetings, engaged in a process of negotiation, even though it felt like having entertaining discussions. I would say this is always a pre condition for making the lay/ researcher mix work: it is the price both sets pay to try to reach, if not consensus, a mutually acceptable way of moving forward.” (RAP5)*

Again the role of the Chair may have formed an important part of bridging between groups:

*“I think she probably made a big difference to the project because of her contacts, her previous experience of this sort of work, and her outgoing personality, and wonder whether all projects need someone like her to straddle the core research team and the public patient involvement and to lead the PPI.” (CRT5)*

#### **4.2.2 What made PPI work less well**

The main issue voiced was the impact of Covid on communication, both in the move to online working and ongoing communication. Management of PPI outside the RAP context may also have been improved.

##### Covid impact on communication



Verbal, direct group communication was essential to the project. However, moving from face to face to online Zoom meetings due to Covid posed a serious challenge to this communication. In addition to challenges of coping with the technology online working led to reduced informality, flexibility and personal connection:

*"... Zoom meetings had to replace classroom meetings during the pandemic. I thought this was a loss to the projects dynamic, nothing can replace personal interaction, a thought or an idea could arise over a coffee or an informal chat at break time, it's these little yet important things that can't be done over Zoom."* (RAP2)

*"... it's not quite the same as meeting in person where you can gain more insight about a person and build a stronger connection."* (CRT4)

Some of the above may have been ameliorated by utilising additional Zoom options:

*"Maybe more ongoing 'social' type meetings of some sort in breakout rooms might have been useful to cement further the RAP together"* (CRT3)

However, these would have required more time commitment, and managing the technology for ordinary Zoom meetings was already challenging for some RAP members. Further, the reduction in detection of non-verbal communication was an important online challenge that would still be hard to mitigate:

*"... it is hard to judge atmosphere remotely. When you are talking about very sensitive matters it is harder to show empathy/sympathy from a distance."* (RAP5)

*"... it's hard to get the balance right and make sure that everyone gets the chance to contribute ... as there are less apparent cues which you can pick up on from people's body language to signal when someone is wanting to jump in and say something ....I think also given the sensitive nature of the subject of this research, working remotely makes it harder to read if people are struggling".* (CRT4)

Covid induced home working also meant research team members were less able to follow up RAP communication outside meetings as proactively as they would under normal circumstances due to considerable stresses in juggling work and family roles:

*"This was extremely stressful as I felt torn between two very different roles of mother and researcher. It also affected how much time I could dedicate to regularly contacting carers."* (CRT1)

Being able to have a first meeting face to face made a big difference in mitigating some of the challenges of effective PPI through distance working, online meetings and emails, particularly when the issue is a sensitive one:

*"Building relationships and regular contact with RAP members are central to a successful working relationship. Luckily we were able to meet face to face one to one and as a group before the lockdown. This helped to build rapport."* (CRT1)

#### Management of PPI outside the RAP context

While the role of the RAP Chair worked well in in the context of the RAP itself, the RAP Chair was also a participant in Research Management Group meetings. Here the Chair's role on the RMG may have been better defined as there was an element of her perhaps feeling like an onlooker listening to specialists.

*"...I always felt a bit on the outside. My main purpose was supposedly to provide PPI/PPE/lay input but this felt like an add-on on occasions, and we did have a member(s) on the (RMG) who were experts in PPI/PPE who probably felt more expert in this area..."* (RAP5)

This highlights the importance of clarifying and negotiating how PPI fits in across the processes and management structure of the project as a whole.

## 5 Discussion

This paper seeks to add to the limited literature on PPI in evidence synthesis by reporting principles and components that appeared to facilitate successful PPI, to inform future projects.<sup>4,8</sup> This includes an evolution from PPI consultation to co-production, whereas most systematic reviews remain at the level of consultation.<sup>2</sup> Further, it illustrates how meaningful co-production can be achieved during remote working, indicating the viability of hybrid ways of working. However, it also highlights the time and resources required for meaningful PPI.

### Principles

The project ensured it created a strong, viable carer RAP whose perspectives could be properly expressed. Firstly, by investing considerable time on recruitment processes to ensure an eligible, diverse and balanced group.<sup>1,5,14</sup> Secondly, through the composition of RAP meetings, with carers in the majority for mutual support. Thirdly, through a Chair who combined carer and chairing experience, providing both an understanding of the carer perspective and the confidence to bring it to the fore, whilst nurturing 'novice' PPI members. Being an 'expert PPI member' also helped the Chair facilitate bridging of researcher and carer perspectives.

Further, the project signalled the value placed on PPI from the outset. Firstly, through prompt and appropriate payment<sup>1,3</sup> which demonstrated the tangible value ascribed to PPI. RAP feedback noted this as important. Secondly, through strong and senior researcher representation at RAP meetings. Finally, by facilitating responsiveness to RAP input by providing 'space to talk' outside the agenda structure, and 'space to change',<sup>1,5</sup> which led to substantial project changes. Additional principles of ongoing training, proper preparation and ongoing communication<sup>1,6,14</sup> further ensured RAP could contribute actively.

This enabled meaningful PPI and movement from mere consultation to the co-production of RAP carer recommendations based on findings (Table 2). These were presented to the broader stakeholder groups in Stage 2 alongside evidence synthesis findings, and perceived to be valuable in their own right [Stage 2 to be reported in a future report].

Joint researcher and carer reflection indicated components underpinning this successful PPI. Firstly, there was a shared sense of the purpose and gains from RAP involvement. This may have been facilitated by individual pre-project meetings and 'foundations' laid in Meeting 1. Secondly, there was mutual commitment and respect, possibly facilitated by early signalling of how carers were valued, clarification of project aims, and agreement of how to work together. Finally, there was meaningful bridging between academic and lay perspectives, based on sound principles of training and preparation, creation of a sense of equal partnership, and willingness by both parties to negotiate and compromise. Remote working enforced by Covid was perceived to hamper meeting communication, but there was sufficient resilience in the carer-researcher collaboration to overcome this.

The project applied principles drawn from existing literature.<sup>1,3,5-7,14,15</sup> Additionally, it carefully considered participant composition at meetings and use of the Chair to foster meaningful involvement, which has been given less attention, although Buck et al<sup>14</sup> recommended using larger PPI groups, rather than single members. We cannot know to what extent successful project PPI was down to principles employed, as opposed to the characteristics of the participants (researchers and carers). However, it may be telling that the PPI input on the Research Management Group worked

less well, where some of the same participants were involved (Chair and research team), but there was less preparation and prior definition of roles and only one PPI member. Nevertheless, it is not a given that success would follow from mechanistic application of PPI principles in the absence of positive, constructive attitudes and a willingness to compromise and change. Knowles et al<sup>3</sup> concluded that relational openness was more important to build trust for successful PPI than any particular methods used. However, the above principles are probably an important bedrock on which such openness and trust can be built.

#### Hybrid working

Our project indicates that meaningful co-production can be achieved through a hybrid between face-to-face and remote working. Covid provided an enforced 'opportunity' to test how project PPI could be maintained through online video meetings. Virtual meetings led to reduction in informality, flexibility, personal connection and non-verbal communication, compared to face-to-face. However, early face-to-face groundwork, including relationship building, agreement of how to work together and understanding of each others' roles, appeared to enable productive collaboration to continue remotely.

Online working also made meetings logistically easier to arrange and to attend, particularly for those more geographically distant (although meeting preparation required from researchers and carers may actually have increased). This may have facilitated the consistently solid attendance across meetings. Research indicates that remote working increases inclusiveness in terms of geography,<sup>7,19</sup> and also race, ethnicity, education, income,<sup>19</sup> and accessibility for those affected by ill health or caregiving.<sup>20</sup> Previously, remote working may often have been limited to electronic communication through online forums<sup>20</sup> or email,<sup>7</sup> with tele- and videoconferencing being relatively costly, limiting opportunity for dynamic interaction. However, online virtual meetings have now become a more viable, less costly option through greater access to online video meeting platforms, laptops and mobiles. Whilst face-to-face working is still preferred<sup>7,14</sup> and probably necessary for relationship building, further research is warranted on how and when remote working provides a viable alternative.

#### Resourcing meaningful PPI

Adequate resources need to be built into PPI budgets from the outset to achieve meaningful PPI.<sup>2,5</sup> This includes proper investment in recruitment and participant preparation<sup>2</sup> and ample time and resources for meetings to permit dynamic interaction and collaboration. In particular, allowing for 'space to talk' and 'space to change'<sup>3</sup> to achieve genuine co-production has resource implications. Accommodating change in our project not only required researchers' willingness to be flexible and make adaptations and RAP members' willingness to take on extra work and involvement, it also required proper resourcing: first, to enable payment for additional RAP hours to accommodate changes; second, to allow extended and protected project time for researchers to facilitate communication and develop or adapt materials. Here Covid in fact helped facilitate more 'space' to make changes, as time and costs saved by moving to virtual meetings (on travel, venues, catering) provided more flexibility to incorporate required adaptations. However, projects cannot generally rely on such serendipity. Ability to work iteratively and make changes in response to PPI input is central to co-production. Such flexibility therefore needs to be built into projects. However, structures of academic funding can currently make this difficult<sup>3</sup>, and more flexible funding models for PPI may need to be considered.

Going forward, future projects must budget properly for PPI participants' time and ability to participate to allow meaningful engagement. This includes time for preparation, travel, meeting hours and review, and reimbursement for travel, subsistence and/or internet connectivity. However, a major PPI cost that may be overlooked in budgets is adequate researcher time for PPI in the

project schedule, including time for proper meeting preparation (including procedures, documents and training); responding to meeting feedback (including production of new/ amended project materials, procedures and schedules); and ongoing communication and engagement (including gaining PPI review and feedback for amendments). Preparing for PPI (before PPI engagement formally commences) is also resource intensive, but proved crucial to our project. However, this may pose a dilemma as it should ideally take place before the start of the project proper, at which point funding may not be available. For example, we adopted a broad carer RAP recruitment strategy before project start, but it yielded few candidates, and would probably have been more effective had there been more resources for this, e.g. to speak to carer group leads and present to group members. For longer term longitudinal projects it would also be beneficial to recruit and cost for a larger PPI group, to allow for potential drop-out along the way. Additionally, building in 'space to change' would require PPI budgets that are realistic about costs, but where there is flexibility regarding details of how money should be spent, with allowance for viring between budget headings. Finally, meaningful PPI engagement for funded projects may be further aided by easier access to flexible PPI funds for preparing PPI before project start or accommodating unexpected, added work arising out of PPI feedback.

### Limitations

A strength was the joint reflection of both researchers and carers on PPI in the project. However, it would have been beneficial to evaluate researcher and RAP experiences of PPI at each project stage rather than just at the end. This would have provided richer insights and enabled ongoing project improvements. However, the time and capacity for evaluation was limited within the tight timetable. The reflections from the RAP and researchers at the end of the project did provide some insight into their respective perspectives, but did not permit in-depth exploration. Further, this was a small set of respondents where identities were known to analysts and could be guessed at by others. Whilst group members (both RAP and researchers) were used to having open and frank discussion, this may still have made some respondents hold back on any negative feedback. The evaluation did not include a RAP member who stepped back towards the end of the project and who may also have had more mixed views of the experience. Finally, the analysis was conducted and written up by researchers who also had contributed responses, and reviewed by the group who had contributed responses as a whole. Although, honest feedback and objective analysis was attempted, the conclusions may therefore be biased towards existing views. Researcher and RAP views therefore remain a piece of self-reflection, rather than an independent investigation.

### Dissemination

Carer RAP recommendations and PPI work have been reported to stakeholder groups through project meetings, workshops and focus groups and will be disseminated via posters and leaflets, podcasts, webinars and the project website. Awareness of the findings will be raised via Twitter and through stakeholder networks of NIHR ARC Greater Manchester and co-applicants. The current paper, reports for additional project components, and all project materials will be available through the project website <https://www.arc-gm.nihr.ac.uk/carers-project->.

## **6 Conclusion**

This paper outlines the principles and components that appeared to facilitate successful, meaningful PPI in this project, to help address the lack of information on what leads to meaningful PPI and inform PPI in other evidence synthesis projects.<sup>5,8</sup> Important elements were the emphasis placed on preparation work, RAP meeting composition and enabling 'space to talk' and 'space to change'.

This allowed RAP carer recommendations to emerge as a valuable and substantial project output. The recommendations highlight the importance of awareness raising of and about carers; providing

a carer 'road map'; bespoke carer support; accounting for carers' contributions in patient assessments; ensuring coordination; and dealing with practical matters, particularly finance. Importantly, the recommendations should have relevance for carers in a range of caregiving contexts (e.g. encompassing caregiving for short term conditions with late diagnosis and short prognosis, through to long term conditions such as dementia) and highlight the need for bespoke support based on holistic assessment of support needs.

Whilst we have described principles that appeared to enable successful co-production in this project, these require testing in future work, including the importance of early relationship building, group composition and Chair selection. As online meetings may enable greater inclusiveness and flexibility, it would be important to investigate further the preconditions for successful online working, and which elements of face-to-face working may be replicated online and which cannot, and under what circumstances. Finally, the time and resources for meaningful PPI should not be underestimated, and flexible funding models should be considered to enable iterative and responsive working to allow genuine co-production.

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## **Contributions of authors**

The project protocol was developed by Gunn Grande (Professor of Palliative Care, Chief Investigator, palliative care, carers, health psychology), Christine Rowland (Research Fellow, Co-applicant, health psychology and outcome measures), Alison Wearden (Professor of Health Psychology, Co-applicant, health psychology and carers), Jackie Flynn (PPI representative and RAP chair, Co-applicant, caregiver experience and PPI), Penny Bee (Professor of Applied Mental Health Research, Co-applicant, mental health, health services research), Morag Farquhar (Professor of Palliative Care Research, Co-applicant, palliative care, carers and nursing) and Maria Panagioti (Senior Lecturer, Co-applicant, quantitative evidence synthesis, primary care, mental health). Kerin Bayliss (Research Associate, research staff, PPI and qualitative evidence synthesis) and Tracey Shield (Research Fellow, research staff, mixed-methods evidence synthesis) managed the collaboration with the RAP supported by Gunn Grande, and later also Christine Rowland and Danielle Harris (Research Assistant, research staff, PPI), including the development of project materials. Jackie Flynn chaired the RAP and facilitated the collaboration between researchers and the RAP. Margaret Booth (carer RAP member, caregiver experience), David Cotterill (carer RAP member, caregiver experience), Cedric Knipe (carer RAP member, caregiver experience) and Lesley Goodburn (carer RAP member, caregiver experience) helped with qualitative analysis, advised on project processes findings and materials, helped shape the direction of the project and produced the carer Recommendations with input from Tracey Shield. Penny Bee, Alison Wearden, Alexander Hodkinson and Morag Farquhar reviewed and advised on the RAP collaboration. Kerin Bayliss, Gunn Grande, Christine Rowland, Danielle Harris, Alexander Hodkinson, Alison Wearden, Margaret Booth, David Cotterill, Cedric Knipe and Lesley Goodburn contributed to the reflections on PPI. Gunn Grande, Kerin Bayliss and Christine Rowland analysed the reflections. Gunn Grande drafted the manuscript with help from Kerin Bayliss. All authors (Gunn Grande, Kerin Bayliss, Tracey Shield, Jackie Flynn, Christine Rowland, Danielle Harris, Alison Wearden, Morag Farquhar, Maria Panagioti, Alexander Hodkinson, Margaret Booth, David Cotterill, Leslie Goodburn, Cedric Knipe, Penny Bee) had access to study data; reviewed the synthesis of project principles, outputs and reflections; provided critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content; and take responsibility for data integrity and analysis.

## **Ethics statement / approval(s)**

This is a report on the PPI in an evidence synthesis of existing literature and of the co-authors' reflections on the process. All data reported were generated by the co-authors and reviewed and approved by them. Consultation with the University of Manchester Research Practice Governance Office established that the project did not require ethics approval.

## **Information governance**

There were no personal data involved in the production of this report.

## **Data sharing**

For further data relating to this report and the project as a whole visit the project website <https://www.arc-gm.nihr.ac.uk/carers-project-> . For further information on PPI processes and

materials please contact the corresponding author. Individual reflections are not available due to confidentiality.

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## **SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL**

# SUPPLEMENT 1: RECOMMENDATIONS FROM CARER RESEARCH ADVISORY PANEL (DETAILED VERSION)

## RESEARCH ADVISORY PANEL DELIBERATIONS

The recommendations developed by the Carer Research Advisory Panel (RAP) are based on the following reflections and considerations in relation to the research evidence considered:

- The RAP discussed the importance of the relationship between the carer and the person they are caring for. It was noted that while the patient condition impacts on the mental health of the carer, the RAP recognises there is little that carers can do to change the patient's condition. Taking this into account, RAP recommendations are based on making things as easy as possible for the carer, and removing obstacles which might stop them being a better carer. This includes removing/reducing unnecessary demands on the carer's time to allow more time for the carer to look after the person they are caring for. The RAP considered this to be very important because the perception that they might not be offering the optimum care could have a significant impact on carer's mental health.
- The RAP discussed the importance of carers feeling empowered, having their voices heard, and having proper engagement with services as active participants within their caregiving role. The RAP considered these to be important aspects in maintaining and improving carer mental health.
- The RAP recognises that the circumstances and experiences of individual carers are likely to vary and that *'one size does not fit all'*. This may extend to carers experiencing different feelings about being a carer, as well as differences in the dynamics of the patient-carer relationship. Taking individual circumstances into account, RAP recommendations are based on overcoming what the RAP considered to be common challenges experienced by end of life carers that may help to support the mental health of the majority of those carers.
- The recommendations were based on a desire to support carers to maintain and/or improve their mental health, and not *'make things worse'*.
- The RAP noted the importance of considering the mental health of bereaved carers, alongside the mental health of end of life caregivers. Where appropriate, the recommendations should take into account the end of life caregiving journey post bereavement.
- The RAP recognised the need to be pragmatic in relation to the recommendations they could develop based on limits of what services can provide, and therefore focused on what might be changed to support carer mental health.
- The seven specific themes identified from the research evidence as affecting carers' mental health were informed by the RAP discussion. These were: patient condition, impact of caring responsibilities (e.g. workload, life changes), quality of relationships, finances, carers' own internal processes (e.g. carers' belief in their own ability, coping strategies), formal/informal support and contextual factors (e.g. age, gender). While the RAP agreed that these are useful way

of presenting /grouping the evidence, they acknowledged that these themes are not a comprehensive account of what influences carers' mental health. The RAP specifically noted gaps in the research evidence in relation to personal identity and the experience of grief.

- The RAP discussed the challenge of developing recommendations around the seven specific themes identified from the research evidence. In the light of these, RAP members focused on developing recommendations which reflected the full extent of the end of life caregiving journey.
- We therefore first present what can be termed 'Overarching principles' which refer to recommendations which extend across all seven themes identified from the research evidence. Next, we present recommendations that have been placed under specific themes (presented as 'Theme specific'). These reflect those recommendations which 'fit' with the themes from the research evidence, rather than a comprehensive list of recommendations developed for each theme.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Overarching principles

### *1) Awareness raising*

The RAP recommends the following, acknowledging that while there are many good services available, these are not always effectively communicated to carers in a timely manner in ways that meet their needs and personal circumstances:

*a) Carers are made aware of the support services available to them or the person they are caring for*

- Carers should be made aware of the local services (including private sector and social services) that are available for people they are caring for e.g. local dentist or opticians or where to go to obtain a wheelchair for the person they are caring for.

*b) Raising awareness among health care professionals of the need to address the impact of end of life caregiving on carers:*

- Health care professionals should have a greater awareness of the need to address the impact of end of life caregiving on carers, including recognising that carers' needs extend into bereavement.

### *2) Road Map to support carers to navigate the end of life caregiving journey/process*

The RAP recommends the following, noting that the end of life caregiving journey extends into bereavement:

- Carers should be provided with a 'road map' containing all the relevant information to prepare and support them to navigate their way through each stage of the journey/process of end of life caregiving. This road map needs to be holistic in approach and include:
  - Information on what help is available locally for carers and where carers can go to get this help. This needs to include information on local services (including private sector and social services) available for the person they are caring for and be holistic in nature
  - Information on how to access specialist equipment (e.g. wheel chairs, hospital beds, hoists, continence pads) and services (e.g. physiotherapy) for the patient at home
  - Information relating to practical advice, which might include: legal advice and making a Power of Attorney; financial advice; service advice
  - Lists of useful telephone numbers, websites, and email addresses.

### *3) Bespoke support which recognises the carer has needs and identifies them through assessment*

The RAP recommends the following, recognising that: carers' needs are holistic and extend to medical, personal and social needs; and that support should be tailored where possible according to the needs and personal circumstances of individual carers:

- Services providers should recognise that carers have needs and use appropriate tools to assess them.
- Needs assessment should be comprehensive, include assessment of medical, personal and social needs, and take into account the carer's actual needs, rather than just what services can offer.
- Services should take into account the carer's personal circumstances when looking to support carers.

#### ***4) Standardized Comprehensive Assessment to assess 'actual' needs of the patient***

The RAP recommends the following, to ensure that the person the carer is caring for receives the care and support they need, and that the carer's role in achieving and maintaining this is understood, as carers' mental health is likely to be better when the patient is well supported and carers' feel able to manage the caregiving tasks:

- Patients should be assessed for their 'actual' needs as opposed to their 'managed' needs. Actual needs assessment should take into account all the support the carer currently provides to the patient e.g. making meals and food shopping, to ensure the assessment does not conclude that the patient is more capable than they really are, with their dependency on the carer's support being fully recognised.
- Assessment should be standardized across services and provide a comprehensive assessment of the patient's actual needs.

#### ***5) Coordinated and timely care through provision of a single point of contact for the carer***

The RAP recommends the following, based on their recognition that carers do not necessarily know how to navigate the health and social care system, and will need support in articulating their specific needs:

- Carers should be given access to a key worker (who may or may not be a healthcare professional) as a single point of contact, to ensure patient care is timely, continuous, and that the care of both the carer and the person they are caring for is coordinated. This support should extend to:
  - Comprehensive assessment of needs, including medical, personal and social needs
  - Helping carers with administrative tasks e.g. filling in necessary forms
  - Sign posting and/or referral to the relevant services to assist with the carer's needs
  - Follow up with relevant services, including post bereavement.
  - Advocacy support to help carers articulate what they need.

#### ***6) Practical considerations/Essential Resources:***

The RAP felt this was a fundamental factor which needs to be addressed. It takes into account the following: that carers have to self-declare to be recognised as a carer, which can be difficult for some; that carers will not necessarily live in the same household as the person they are caring for; and that time is of the essence for end of life caregiving.

As a minimum, the RAP recommends the following, taking into account that carers are more likely to experience better mental health when the person they are caring for is receiving the care and support they need, and when demands on the carer's time is reduced:

- Carers need to feel safe in the knowledge that their basic physical needs will be met, both during end of life caregiving and post-bereavement.
- Carers are not financially disadvantaged by their caregiving role and are given (as an absolute minimum) sufficient finances (such as in the form of a decent carers allowance, where eligible) to ensure their basic needs are being met. These include the ability to continue to pay rent, bills and 'put a decent meal on the table'.
- Equipment for the patient should be easily accessible, be provided in a timely manner, not arriving after the patient no longer requires it. Retrieving equipment following death needs to be handled promptly and sensitively.
- Carers should be given access to practical advice, including early legal advice and financial advice about matters such as obtaining a Power of Attorney, will making and Do Not Resuscitate where appropriate.
- Carers should be given timely advice on their eligibility for funding for care costs, including their eligibility for a housing adaption grant with timely follow up, where relevant to the carer's circumstances.

## Theme specific recommendations

### *Patient Condition*

The RAP recommends the following, based on their recognition that carers are more likely to experience better mental health when the person they are caring for is receiving the care and support they need:

- Relevant information about the patient's end of life condition should be made accessible, in a timely manner.
- The patients' symptoms should be controlled.
- Health care professionals should recognise that palliative patients may have other conditions which are still treatable e.g. patient may still require access to dentistry services and opticians.
- Patients who require treatment and care for conditions not palliative in nature should continue to be referred to appropriate care that accommodates the patient's changing mobility.
- Patients' treatment and care should be holistic in approach.
- Patients' care should be co-ordinated, and continuous, rather than being fragmented.
  - Carers should not need to tell their 'story' repeatedly. This could be addressed by providing the carer with a folder which holds all the relevant patient information which they can take along with them to appointments
  - Provision should not depend on where the carer lives
  - Patients should be able to see the same GP over the course of end of life caregiving.

## *Impact of Caring Responsibilities*

The RAP recommends the following:

- Carers should be able to spend quality time with the person they are caring for and have sufficient time for caregiving, and their own concerns. Helping carers with some of the coordination and administration and making it easier to navigate their way through each stage of the journey/process of end of life caregiving will help to free up time for the carer and help to reduce the impact of caring responsibilities on them.

## *Finances*

The RAP felt this was a fundamental factor which needs to be addressed. This needs to take into account the following: that carers have to self-declare to be recognised as a carer, which can be difficult for some; that carers will not necessarily live in the same household as the person they are caring for; time is of the **essence for end of life caregiving. As a minimum, the RAP recommends the following:**

- Carers should not be financially disadvantaged by their caregiving role and should be given (as an absolute minimum) sufficient finances (such as in the form of a decent carers' allowance, where eligible) to ensure their basic needs are being met. These include the ability to continue to pay rent, bills and 'put a decent meal on the table'.
- Carers should have access to financial and other relevant advice, which might include early legal advice about decisions ahead and making Power of Attorney where relevant to the carer's circumstances.
- Carers should be given timely advice on their eligibility for funding for care costs, including their eligibility for a housing adaption grant with timely follow up, where relevant to the carer's circumstances.

## *Relationships*

The RAP recommends the following, while acknowledging that carers may experience different feelings about being a carer and recognising that the quality of the patient-carer relationship may differ:

- Carers should be enabled to spend adequate time with the patient. Making it easy for carers to navigate their way through each stage of the journey/process of end of life caregiving without 'trailing from pillar to post' will help to take the pressure off carers and free up time for the carer to spend more time with the person they are caring for.

## *Carer Internal Processes*

The RAP recommends the following, recognising that some carers may need 'permission' to feel the way they feel:

- Carers need to have an outlet for 'venting emotions'.



## Support

### (a) Recommendations about support for the patient

The RAP recommends the following, based on their recognition that carers are more likely to experience better mental health when the person they are caring for is receiving the care and support they need:

- Support for patients should be readily available, responsive, accessible and flexible.
  - Carers should have the option of receiving support for the patient at home or close to home rather than having to travel to a hospital or GP to get it, wherever possible
  - Home care services for the patient should be flexible and responsive to the patient's needs and take into account the time of visits that meet the needs of the patient. Patients should not have to cancel all visits scheduled for the day just because they do not want the first visit in the morning when the morning does not suit the patient.
- Dyadic (joint) support should be available for both the carer and the person they are caring for if that is their preference.

### (b) Recommendations about support for the carer

- Service providers should recognise that carers have needs and use appropriate tools to address them. Assessment should be comprehensive and take account of the carer's actual needs, not just what services can offer.
- Individual formal support should be made available for the carer.
  - Carers should be able to receive general counselling services when they need a safe space to 'vent'
  - Carers should be permitted to remain in the system after palliative care services have been withdrawn in order to receive post-bereavement counselling and other support services post-bereavement.
- Individual informal support is available for the carer.
  - Carers should have early access to local support/peer support groups. These can also help carers to identify further sources of help/support they might not otherwise hear about.

## Contextual factors

The RAP recommends that all recommendations take into account: the specific context; personal circumstances; and preferences wherever possible, of individual carers.