



**RESPONSE TO IMPLEMENTING  
THE HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES  
AND PUBLIC SAFETY (HPSS)  
GOOD PRACTICE REVIEW**

**OCTOBER 2003**

## **IMPLEMENTING THE HPSS GOOD PRACTICE REVIEWS RESPONSE TO ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

### **1.0 Introduction**

- 1.1 The four Northern Ireland Health and Social Services Councils were established to represent the interests of the public in all areas of health and social services in Northern Ireland. An important part of our role is to provide advice, support and assistance to people who are unhappy with any aspect of health and social services.
- 1.2 We welcome the opportunity to respond jointly to this consultation document and our comments where appropriate are based on our experiences of helping members of the public.

### **2.0 Contact Information**

- 2.1 Can people find the appropriate organisation and the person who can best help them?  
A lot of information enquiries which are dealt with by Council staff relate to how people can access services. They are looking primarily for telephone numbers, addresses and contact persons. This basic information is poorly and inconsistently displayed (if at all) in telephone directories, yellow pages, etc. A particular difficulty is where information is displayed under the management Trust name.
- 2.2 A few organisations produce information directories but again people need to know these exist, where they can be seen, and that the information is regularly reviewed and updated.
- 2.3 Much more needs to be done to publicise services and ensure that people outside the system can find contact information easily.

### **3.0 Verbal Information**

- 3.1 The guidance states that it tends to be focussed on written communications. However the importance of verbal information particularly at the time of diagnosis and treatment cannot be understated. Such information also needs to be timely accurate, appropriate and clear and delivered in a way which suits people's needs at the time. People also need information about choices and risk.
- 3.2 It is important to test the persons understanding of the information, the decisions they must make, the alternatives available, the risks involved and the likely outcomes. It is necessary to allow time to digest the information, to ask questions and to offer to repeat the information and further discuss if necessary.

#### **4.0 Written Information**

- 4.1 While we support the need for a 'readability' test on written or visual forms of information we suggest end users should be involved at the start to ensure the information addresses the questions and issues which are important to them. All information should be in plain English and tested for clarity and understanding.
- 4.2 While some of the advice makes reference to 'campaigns' most information is that which should be available to a target audience over a period of time. In this respect it is important to have regard to the information being up to date with contact persons, addresses, telephone numbers, text phones and e-mail appropriate and current. Post codes and dialling codes should always be included. Useful addresses, etc of other contact organisations should be included where appropriate.
- 4.3 It is also necessary to review circulation as information, when on public display, often does not get replenished when stocks are used. Someone needs to have the responsibility for information points to reorder supplies, tidy and replenish as appropriate and remove/replace that which is outdated or superseded.
- 4.4 In designing leaflets it is important that the method of display is taken into account. It is common at 'information points' to have racked displays with overlap. In this instance it is necessary to have key words or a title message at the top of the leaflet so that people know at a glance what it is about. Logos or graphics should not dominate the title.
- Print size and style should be standardised with particular attention to recommended font sizes. Overprinting or using background images can be distracting for the reader.
- 4.5 Where return cards are included they should be:
- perforated for tearing off
  - have gummed edges and fold instructions and design to ensure confidentiality
  - of sufficient thickness to be opaque
  - post paid or freepost
- 4.6 Other formats of information should be available e.g. tape, large print, Braille and this information should be stated in the leaflet.
- 4.7 The information should be available in other languages and the principles of involving users, testing readability, understanding, etc should apply.