

## **Care Companion launched at Stratford Hospital**



We all know that the need for family care is increasing with the ageing population. Whilst rewarding, caring can be demanding, emotionally draining and isolating. Carers may not have the skills or knowledge to give the care that is best for the loved one. Additionally, a point often overlooked, is how to make sure carers know how to look after themselves.

The Care Companion project has been designed to address these issues, and was launched on 26 April at Stratford on Avon Hospital. The project originally started with ideas from family carers, and has been developed by primary care specialists and researchers at Warwick Medical School, NHS and local authority managers and health care professionals, Age UK Warwickshire and other voluntary organisations. It is funded by Coventry and Rugby CCG, South Warwickshire CCG, Warwickshire County Council and Global Initiative £100K Social Digital Fund. Care Companion is a unique personalised online resource for carers of older people, simple to use and accessible at all times.

**Professor Jeremy Dale, Head of Primary care at Warwick Medical School** emphasised the increasing need of carers of the elderly and the difficulties and complications carers have accessing reliable information to support their care.

**Gillian Grason Smith, an informal carer and a key mover in the project** told us how 11% of the population of Warwickshire are informal carers. Care Companion is designed to increase carer self-confidence, to help carers provide carer information that can be trusted. One of the Care Companion lay panel member epitomised the carer situation as “I didn’t know what I needed to know until I needed to know it”. Exactly!

**The Rt Hon Jeremy Wright Member of Parliament for Kenilworth and Southam** emphasised the need to care for the carer and for feedback to help improve the future care of the elderly. The web-based technology was managed by a team led by **Chris Sinclair, Director of Global Initiative Ltd Oxford**. Chris explained the key features of Care Companion: it is personalised to meet the differing needs of individual carers; to provide ‘curated’ resource of carer information – that is, information that has been vetted by the Carer Panel for accuracy, relevance and reliability; a Diary to record appointments, medicines and that can be used to monitor progress of the loved one; there is an Address book to help the carer access support easily; a Glossary explains the many acronyms and technical health terms. Finally, a ‘To do’ list prompts carers not to overlook vital tasks.

**Amanda Cogley, Commissioning Support Officer and Wellbeing for Warwickshire County Council (WCC)** explained that there are 80K informal carers in Warwickshire, that WCC is fully aware of their vital role in the community, the intensive nature of caring and is fully involved in improving these situations.

**Matt Western, Member of Parliament for Warwick & Leamington** expressed his keen interest and support with ideas how to inform the highest levels of Government about the Care Companion project. Then followed open discussions on how best to implement Care Companion into the NHS, and the potential to use records of carer experiences to analyse and identify research to improve future caring.

The next step is for the Care Companion team to assess the rate of carer take up in the community and to measure the benefits to carers.

**Andrew Entwistle**  
Member of the Care Companion Carers’ Panel