

Carer stress – automated messages Protocol WMAHSN-34

Purpose

- To support someone who is providing care to family or friends who perceives that they are experiencing stress from that caring role
- To encourage a culture of taking personal responsibility for self-management – for containing or beating personal stress

Overarching purpose – WMAHSN Flo exemplar of integrated care initiative extend application direct to carers in rollout pilot to highlight opportunities for other applications of Flo telehealth for them/people with long term conditions or adverse lifestyle habits.

Setting

Any home setting where a person living in North Staffordshire/Stafford area is providing unpaid care to a family member or friend

Selection of participants

Anyone living in, or associated with, North Staffordshire/Stoke-on-Trent /Stafford & Surrounds CCGs that have a licence to use Flo telehealth:

- Person self reporting stress associated with their unpaid caring role
- Person who chooses to receive automated messaging about personal stress than seek initial counselling support

Expected outcomes

1. Maintenance of unpaid caring role:
 - Less stressed participant more efficient and productive – more likely to continue to provide efficient care in home of person being cared for in acceptable ways
2. Participant empowerment :
 - Confidence to deal with personal stress and enhance own psychosocial wellbeing
 - Greater understanding of impact of stress on physical health /wellbeing
 - Motivated to make lifestyle or other changes to improve physical and/or mental health
3. Improved personal outcomes:
 - Reduction in extent and impact of perceived carer related stress
4. Popularity of Flo:
 - Participant finds Flo messages helpful and reassuring
 - Participant finds Flo reinforces good self management

Success criteria

- If we evaluate with Flo text evaluation questions; 30% report having identified stressors in their lives and 30% of these report taking remedial actions (in response to Flo texted questions at week 4 and week 8)

Protocol

In summary:

- Participant completes initial stress questionnaire/ completes goals and decides to sign up to Flo (in this case automated carer stress version) for two months period.
- Participant receives daily information messages about stress and prevention/actions to minimise stress from caring

- Participant responds to monthly text questions about the use of Flo

Participant:

- Signs consent form agreeing to read messages from Flo; accepting responsibility for their own health and acknowledging that automated messaging is from a computer
- Receives daily information messages about stress and tries to adopt advice given
- Responds to monthly texts from Flo about satisfaction with service

Service operator (Chris Chambers/WMAHSN Flo exemplar team):

- Provides automated information Flo version for carer related stress
- Obtains an electronic signed agreement to read messaging from Flo and a consent form for participation and that participant remains responsible for their own health
- Supports participant in enrolling on Flo by using their current mobile phone number and then selecting the appropriate service for them
- Utilises materials on how to sign up to Flo, use Flo, signs up people themselves
- Keeps note of participants enrolled on telehealth carer project

Information messages

Daily for 8 weeks

1. Carers are special; you are giving care and people you know admire what you do.
2. Find ways to tackle any major sources of stress that you are experiencing; don't avoid doing so.
3. Managing your time better can reduce your stress if you reserve more time for things you want to do.
4. Avoid overdoing things; say 'no' when asked to take on any more caring work that is beyond your responsibility.
5. Laughter and fun increase your resilience to the pressures of your life. Seek opportunities for fun at home or work.
6. A problem shared is a problem halved. So get on and find someone to share it with.
7. Challenge any behaviour that's causing you stress like bullying; don't put up with it.
8. Lots of little sources of stress can equal a one-off major stressor. Tackle what you can change rather than worry about things beyond your control.
9. Think what you might do to help yourself feel more in control, rather than defeated all the time.
10. Stress is not always bad. 'Good' stress can have a positive impact on you and motivate you.
11. Delegating some of your carer tasks to others doesn't mean you can't cope, as it will allow you to focus on the most important tasks.
12. Exercising with your family and friends is a great way to improve your fitness, reduce stress and have fun.
13. Boost your satisfaction with your current everyday life - that will protect you from stress arising from your carer role.
14. Set realistic goals for the care you provide that are specific and achievable.
15. Physical signs of stress may include: a fast heart rate, excessive sweating, dry mouth. If you experience these symptoms think of ways to relax.
16. Relaxation techniques can help you to combat stress. You could try massage with soothing oils? Yoga and Tai Chi are all about relaxation and deep breathing.
17. Learn to cope better with stress by controlling your sources of pressure and developing positive thinking – you can do it.
18. Some pressure can improve your performance but too much can lead to stress and being less effective.
19. If you are feeling depressed and caring is getting too much, consult your GP to see what help there is for you.
20. If you are in work, take steps to increase control over your work. This will boost your job satisfaction and reduce risk of work stress.
21. Chat to a family member or friend if you need support to cope with the demands of your caring role.

22. Don't start a job unless you've got time to finish it – or you'll waste time overall.
23. Remember you will feel better with a healthy diet and regular exercise.
24. Exercise and laughter are both great stress busters, so find a sport or hobby you can enjoy and have a laugh!
25. Work smarter, not harder as a carer. Learn to prioritise tasks.
26. Organise your time better to include leisure, family and social life as well as your carer role.
27. Diversify your career or if you're not at work find another voluntary role, to boost your personal satisfaction and protect you from stress in the future.
28. Speak to people you trust when you're stressed to help alleviate some of your worries.
29. Compromise and appreciate others' perspectives without giving in on things that really matter to you.
30. Don't take on too much work or jobs for other people, or that might lead to stress and you to be less effective.
31. Don't be a perfectionist. Make sure what you do is good enough and that's fine.
32. You may need to accept changing demands or tasks in your carer role, but remain focused on what is important for you as well.
33. Don't relive and dwell on previous mistakes and don't focus too far ahead, focus on now.
34. Delegate, prioritise and manage your commitments and don't put things off.
35. You might feel shame in admitting you can't cope. Seek advice and support early, not as a last resort.
36. Overwork is a top cause of stress. Plan your scheduled breaks and holidays so you get a rest.
37. Plan for the future; limit how much you can take on to prevent you getting stress and exhaustion.
38. Combat stress with regular exercise- physical act should enable you to deal with your pressures more effectively.
39. Say no to any extra tasks if you're already pressed for time.
40. Don't rely on the praise of others. You know yourself when you've done well.
41. Do at least one thing you enjoy each day, to help you cope with the more challenging days.
42. Develop new interests, learn new skills to increase your personal satisfaction and fulfilment.
43. Take control of your problems. Don't say "I can't do anything about this" as that will make your stress worse.
44. If you always do things the same way, you'll always get the same result. Try and find different solutions to problems.
45. Look after your personal health and fitness – no-one else will.
46. Don't be too proud to ask for help.
47. Recognise what you are doing well and that will boost your self esteem.
48. Change your negative thoughts to positive ones.
49. It's not stress itself that is the damaging factor but your inability to cope with it. Find new ways of coping.
50. If stress is affecting your sleep then try: massage, meditation, music or sex. All of these can help you relax and sleep better.
51. Be more assertive! Say no and mean it if asked to take on unnecessary tasks or work that is not your responsibility.
52. Something visual that you can see to distract you can help when the going gets tough – a holiday pic or souvenir.
53. Seeking support is not a sign of weakness or ignorance so don't feel embarrassed or silly to be asking for help.
54. Guard against becoming too involved with other people's problems or you are likely to become emotionally drained.
55. Take time out: take regular holidays, find new hobbies, protect time for you for reading and learning, and keeping fit.
56. Avoid being a workaholic - stop being a perfectionist and don't judge your mistakes too harshly.

**Patient experience
questions**

Flo text to participants

After 4 weeks; and again after 8 weeks:

ANS1 *Please text CC1 if you agree with the statement 'Flo has helped me identify stressors in my life' or CC2 if you disagree*

ANS2 *Now please text CC1 if you agree with the statement 'Flo has helped me take action to reduce stress ' or CC2 if you disagree*

Thank you. Your feedback helps us to improve the Flo service for the future.