

# SOCIAL WORKERS

Most carers come across social workers. But they can do more to help you than you may think. Lynn Eaton explains their role.

**S**ocial Workers are trained in helping people deal with their problems. This may take the form of practical support, such as providing information on what services are available, giving advice on the benefits you may be entitled to, or arranging for a home help to visit you.

But they are also trained to provide more personal support, such as counselling you through any difficulties you may have in coping as a carer. They should be good at listening to what you have to say and helping you to reach your own decisions about how to deal with your problems. If you have complex difficulties, they may refer you to a person who specialises in counselling. (See 'Emotional help: Coping with stress', page 55 for more information on this.)

One of a social worker's guiding principles is that they should provide support and information which will make their clients more powerful. This might mean supplying details of local organisations which can help with your special problems or putting you in touch with a voluntary body or self-help group. It might also mean giving you the confidence to complain if you feel a service is not up to scratch.

## TYPES OF SOCIAL WORKER

You are most likely to come across social workers when you are dealing with social services departments, which is where the majority of them work. But you may also come into contact with them working for voluntary organisations which

provide social services, in day centres, residential homes, health centres and in hospitals, where they help arrange the care of a person leaving hospital.

Some social workers deal solely with children, others with elderly or disabled people. Those who specialise in the care of people who are mentally ill may be known as 'approved' social workers. This means they are able to take legal action to take a mentally ill person into care under the Mental Health Act.

With the changes in community care arrangements which began in April 1993, some social workers are likely to be directly involved in providing services, and others, known as care managers, will make decisions about what services you need and then arrange them for you.

## QUALIFICATIONS

Most social workers will have studied for two years on a specialised course known as a Diploma in Social Work (Dip SW). Before 1992, social workers qualified by undertaking either a Certificate of Qualification in Social Work (CQSW) or a Certificate in Social Services (CSS). These two qualifications are no longer available, but are still recognised.

At the moment, there is no national register of social workers which you can appeal to if you are unhappy with the standard of service they offer. There is, however, a professional association, the British Association of Social Workers, which has its own code of professional conduct.

## USEFUL INFORMATION

**British Association of Social Workers**  
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