

Summer 2005



Prescribing advice

Improving health through CAB advice services



The Citizens Advice service helps people resolve their money, legal and other problems by providing information and advice, and by influencing policymakers.

Citizens Advice Bureaux dealt with 5.6 million enquiries in 2003-04 from a network of 3,200 locations and over 80,000 of those enquiries were health-related problems. Bureaux provide free and independent advice in 751 GP surgeries and health centres, 62 general hospitals, 75 psychiatric hospitals and 165 mental health clinics.

Since 2003, the Department of Health has funded Citizens Advice to provide ICAS (Independent Complaints Advocacy Service) services in six of the nine health regions in England, helping people with concerns about NHS services and treatments. There are 116 ICAS specialists based in 32 bureaux. We helped with nearly 9,000 complaints in the first year and funding for this service has been extended to 2006.

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Policy and evidence reports:

The pain of complaining: CAB ICAS evidence of the NHS complaints procedure, May 2005.

Citizens Advice ICAS, Client satisfaction research, February 2005.

Filling the Gaps: CAB evidence of problems with access to NHS dentistry, February 2005.

Out of the Picture: CAB evidence on mental health and social exclusion, April 2004.

Unhealthy charges: CAB evidence on the impact of charges for NHS treatment, April 2001.

Prescribing advice: health and inequality, 1999.

Citizens Advice Annual Report, 2003/2004.

All available to download at www.citizensadvice.org.uk or call 020 7833 7078.

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Introduction



Making advice available in doctors' surgeries, health centres, hospitals, psychiatric units and mental health clinics significantly improves people's health and well-being. Good advice to tackle non-clinical problems, like low income and debt, relieves the stress and anxiety that often underscore a patient's clinical symptoms.

NHS patients are already prescribed free, independent Citizens Advice Bureaux advice in 1,154 regular outreach services, delivered in partnership with local healthcare providers, across England and Wales. But many more surgeries, health centres and hospitals don't yet have CAB advice on site.

CAB advice services free up time spent by health professionals on patients' social problems, leaving them to concentrate on medical matters. Doctors have found that patients who had received CAB advice visited them less often and needed fewer prescriptions¹, saving on local health budgets.

The Government's white paper, *Choosing Health*, highlights the

link between social exclusion and ill-health and the lifestyle choices that can affect health.

The white paper's implementation strategy describes ways in which partners can work together to tackle health inequalities. Citizens Advice Bureaux can make a contribution to the four key 'themes' in the strategy.

1. Supporting families, mothers and children: Turn to page 10 to see how Birmingham CAB Health Units are supporting teenage parents.

2. Engaging communities and individuals: We talk to Leytonstone CAB (page 7), which targets advice directly at black and minority ethnic mental health service users.

3. Preventing illness and providing effective treatment and care: A growing body of independent, academic research supports the view that good advice makes for better health². When people's income has been increased by good welfare benefit advice, the improvements in their health stay with them³.

4. Addressing the underlying determinants of health: Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) are asked to 'work with partners to promote access to welfare advice and support in health and outreach facilities'. Better Advice, Better Health delivers CAB advice services from

primary care health settings in all 22 Local Health Board areas in Wales (page 11).

Citizens Advice Bureaux have a proven track record of helping vulnerable groups, like mental health service users and older people, and are well-placed to help Local Strategic Partnerships, Primary Care Trusts and others in local health economies reach their National Service Framework targets, as well as those set out in *Choosing Health*.

Our vision is that CAB advice, advocacy and support services should be incorporated into all health service planning and made available to all patients, carers, relatives and health service staff, wherever it is needed, across the health and social care system. We hope that GPs and other purchasers will see the case for working with Citizens Advice to tackle the social and economic causes of the health inequalities that are a blight on our nation's health.



David Harker
Chief Executive
Citizens Advice

¹ Buckingham, Wilmslow and District CAB, 2003.
² Citizens Advice response to *Choosing Health*, Appendix, August 2004.
³ Impact on individual health of welfare benefits advice in healthcare settings, Abbott & Hobby, August 2002.

Grassroots to blue sky

At the heart of CAB advice in health and social care settings is the grassroots work that Citizens Advice Bureaux do with local GPs and health centres.

East Dorset CAB operates regular outreach sessions in three local GP surgeries at Verwood, Sixpenny Handley and Cranborne.

With some clients living up to 20 kilometres away from their nearest CAB and served by only a very poor rural bus service, many people would simply be unable to access the advice they need to tackle the problems their doctors know are affecting their health, if the CAB did not run outreach services at local surgeries.

“People see us about a range of problems, but we do get a lot of benefit enquiries. The doctors refer patients to us so we can check that they are getting all the benefits they may be entitled to,” says adviser Sue Lynch. Often a GP can see that the solution to a patient’s problem is not just clinical but is related to some underlying factor like low income. If they can refer that patient to the CAB adviser, it means they don’t have to send them away empty-handed. “Doctors can’t be expected to

be welfare benefits experts - that’s where we come in,” says Sue. “They are very appreciative of the service and it’s success is very much dependent on their support.”

GPs can be instrumental in building CAB advice work into their business plans, educating the staff and practice managers to see the importance of tackling the underlying factors contributing to ill-health and getting the work funded.

Dr Sandi Malpas, senior partner at the Cranborne practice, is supportive. “Sue has really demonstrated an excellent understanding of the benefits system,” she says. “She has



Happy customer Bill Rivers

River deep

When his old injury started to bother retired forester Bill Rivers again, he saw his doctor, who referred him to Sue, who runs a CAB advice session at his doctor’s surgery once a fortnight. “I use a stick to get about and was starting to have trouble getting in and out of the bath and putting a sock on that foot,” says Bill. Sue helped Bill apply for Attendance Allowance, a claim which was refused twice before finally being awarded at £39.35 a week.

“The extra money has made a hell of a difference to us.”

Like many people, Bill was ready to accept defeat but Sue was keen to fight on. “I thought ‘we’re not going to beg’” But Sue made it clear to Bill and his family that she’d even take the case to a tribunal on their behalf, if necessary. “The extra money has made a hell of a difference to us,” says Bill. “I’m only glad she was in the surgery when I went in.”

helped many patients, with the often complex forms, to claim what is available to them. This help means that patients are better able to cope with a range of disabilities.”

In 2003-04, the East Dorset CAB GP sessions brought in a total of almost £76,000 a year extra in unclaimed benefits to 118 people, boosting their incomes and improving their standard of living.

Recent MORI research⁴ for Citizens Advice showed that 33 per cent of people asked who had visited a CAB reported being less anxious or stressed than they had been before, while 14 per cent said they felt less depressed or reported fewer health problems as a result of their visit.

When things go wrong

The Citizens Advice Independent Complaints Advocacy Service (ICAS) was launched in September 2003. ICAS helps people with concerns about NHS services and treatments raised through the NHS Complaints Procedure. Funded by the Department of Health and covering six English government regions, Citizens Advice ICAS assisted with nearly 9,000 complaints in its first year⁵. 53 per cent of complaints were about hospital services, with problems ranging from rudeness or dirty wards to clinical malpractice and in-patient deaths. A further 20 per cent of complaints were about general medical practice. The service is accessed through any CAB location in England where, if the problem cannot be solved by a generalist CAB



Taking advice to where it is needed

adviser, it will be referred to one of the 116 specialist ICAS staff based in 32 bureaux. You can also access ICAS by calling a local 0845 telephone number.

Client satisfaction research shows that 88 per cent of ICAS clients asked were either ‘very satisfied’ or ‘satisfied’ with the overall level of service – eight per cent up on the previous year.⁶

Putting it right

When a patient makes a complaint, the first job for the ICAS Caseworker is to identify whether any hospital protocols have been breached or if general medical standards have not been met. “We have to work out whether what should have been done has been done by the GP or whether the hospital are doing what the Department of Health recommends they do, and so on,” says Melanie Anderson,

manager of the Combined Hospitals CAB in Salford.

“We work out whether what should have been done has been done.”

ICAS bureaux also deal with many community care issues. “A person may be ready for discharge from hospital and no care plan has been put in place or the client has been told there’s no money to pay for what they think they need. Or a carer may not have had the assessment of their needs that they are entitled to. These are all the sort of challengeable issues we take on for people,” says Melanie.

⁴ MORI Citizens Advice, February 2005.

⁵ Citizens Advice ICAS, December 2004.

⁶ Citizens Advice ICAS, Client satisfaction research, February 2005.

Advice in mind

All Citizens Advice Bureaux aim to make their services sensitive to the particular needs of people with mental health problems and over 100 bureaux are funded to provide advice tailored specifically to those needs.

Vale of Glamorgan CAB offers an outreach service to people with a variety of mental health problems. Conditions such as schizophrenia, acute depression, anxiety, post-natal depression, bi-polar disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder make it difficult for clients to attend high street bureaux. The unfamiliar surroundings and busy waiting rooms are too much to cope with. "Their problems can be totally debilitating.

Keeping score

Journalist Jim Greene already suffered from depression and agoraphobia when, at 50, a heart attack forced him to stop work. His claim for Incapacity Benefit was turned down after he failed to 'score' enough points during a medical examination – a 'personal capability assessment' – designed to assess his eligibility for the benefit. "You are asked whether you can do various tasks," says Jim. "Well, on a good day, I can do all of them and, on a bad day, none of them. I think they just took all my 'good day' answers." Struggling to get by on a small pension and his savings, he was eventually referred to the CAB for money advice.

"She was like the stabilisers on my bike"

"Maggie called up on her computer all the questions I should have been asked at the assessment. It turned out I'd only been asked about a quarter of the questions I should have," says Jim. "She was superb, really gave me hope." Maggie helped Jim fill in the appeal form and eventually attended a full hearing on his behalf. "My agoraphobia meant I couldn't go myself." He was awarded the benefit, as well as a substantial back-dated payment. "The reassurance Maggie gave me throughout was invaluable – she was like the stabilisers on my bike," says Jim.



Tailored advice for mental health service users

They frequently find it almost impossible to handle the day-to-day running of their lives," says adviser Saz Willey. GPs, community mental health nurses and occupational therapists all refer clients to Saz, who arranges appointments at community mental health centres or in the bureau at quiet times to advise on debt, housing, employment and benefit entitlements.

Continuous care

Maggie James runs the Runnymede CAB mental health project in Surrey. Although based in an acute psychiatric unit, most clients

Coming home

Stephen Jones is 23 and suffers from schizophrenia. After his release from prison, Stephen's parents were reluctant to have him home because of his violence and, for similar reasons, the homeless persons' unit also felt unable to place him. He quickly became homeless, living on no income. Stephen's consultant psychiatrist referred him to the CAB which, armed with medical evidence, highlighted his priority need to the homeless persons' unit, who finally gave Stephen accommodation. The CAB assisted Stephen with his benefit entitlements, helping him to win an appeal against his refused Disability Living Allowance claim, increasing his weekly income by £122.55. "He's settled well," says Duah. "He often calls me if he needs advice and has just been accepted to do a degree course at university."

are outpatients, referred by their GPs or by the community mental health teams, plus some self-referrals. "We see a lot of debt," says Maggie.

Many people get confused about what they owe and about what benefits they are claiming so continuity is an important factor. "I've been around a long time," explains Maggie. "If there is a problem, I can often remember details about the client's case, double-check my records and put the matter right."

Working together

Central to the Government's new action plan for tackling discrimination in mental health services for black and minority ethnic people is 'community engagement' – local groups working together to plan effective services, that reflect the particular needs of the client group.

Caseworker Duah Annor of Leytonstone CAB runs monthly advice sessions at a daycentre run by local support group, the Black People's Mental Health Association. "The fact

that I am seen by clients as being from a similar cultural background as them is a massive help in breaking down barriers and building trust," he says. "It also helps that we are seeing them in a setting that they are used to and they are not being expected to attend an unfamiliar place. That is of particular importance to someone with mental health issues, for whom anxiety and stress can trigger a bad reaction."

Wealth of experience

Sheffield Mental Health CAB and Advocacy Service has an active recruitment programme which offers ex-mental health service users the opportunity to undertake accredited training to become CAB advisers, delivering advice and advocacy to other service users in hospital and in the community. The bureau has several paid workers who began as service user volunteers. "The service has benefited from having advisers who are familiar with the various medications and possible side-effects and have first-hand experience of using psychiatric services," says



Duah Annor of Leytonstone CAB speaking about CAB advice work to delegates at the Race and Mental Health: Tackling Inequality conference, in March 2005.

recruitment and training worker, Mo Baxter. "Clients can't always verbalise their needs or how they feel and advisers that have had similar experiences have a greater understanding of the issues and will often ask questions that others don't think of," says Mo.

"Advisers that have had similar experiences have a greater understanding of the issues."

The recruitment of ex-service users is dealt with sensitively. The training involved and working through the self-study packs can seem overwhelming when trainees first start and it may take them longer to complete parts of the course than other trainees. "Some can find the training too demanding and there is a risk of feeling they've failed somehow if they don't manage to stick with it," Mo explains. "We don't want to set people up to fail so achievable goal-setting is important."

Ways and means

Finding ways of getting advice to people when and where they need it means making sure it is in the right place at the right time.

Walsall CAB is part of the Walsall NHS Walk-In Centre, situated right in the centre of the town. Open seven days a week, it was used by over 43,000 people last year. It works like a one-stop shop and CAB advisers sit alongside dental and nursing services, contraception advice, a needle exchange facility and services targeted at Asian women. "We work together to identify cross-referrals and provide a truly holistic service," says advice services manager, Claire Foulkes. "People like the fact that they can deal with every angle of their problem in the one place."

"They can deal with every angle of their problem in the one place."

The value of such a partnership can be illustrated by the experience of a recent client, a man whose wife had just been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. "He was reeling from the shock of the diagnosis," says Claire. "He needed information about the nature of the condition and its prognosis, which he got from the medical staff. Once he was referred to us, we



Gazander Ali, CAB adviser at Walsall NHS Walk-in Centre

gave him information about home care services, support groups, respite care and benefits advice. So he got all he needed in the one place."

Second nature

The built-in privacy of the internet makes it an ideal vehicle for providing health information to younger people for whom using email and text is second nature.

The health section of www.askcab.co.uk, which gets an average of 500-plus 'unique' visits a day, is one of the most used pages on the site. Designed by Wymondham, Attleborough and District and Norwich and District Citizens Advice Bureaux for 13-25 year-olds, it gives basic information about how to access health services and goes into detail on areas like alcohol, drugs, diet, health charges, smoking,

sex, contraception and sexually-transmitted diseases.

"The Government's current health strategies are all about prevention and that's what our site is about," says project worker Pete Eldridge of Wymondham CAB. The money pages have a strong financial literacy feel to them.

"Increasing young people's knowledge of financial matters, which in turn helps them to make better financial choices, very much fits the Government's preventative health agenda."

Outside the box

One of the first CAB information and advice kiosks was installed in the reception area of the Edgware Community Hospital in 2003. A partnership between Barnet CAB and Barnet PCT, the kiosk gives health-promotional type information, as well as links to community organisations that

can provide advice and support about other matters like debt, benefits and housing. "It includes over 350 links to other charities and organisations that can help, as well as to the CAB Adviceguide website and local bureaux", says services manager Helen Kelavey. The site is also linked to the MultiKulti website, which delivers the information in up to 13 community languages. "We learnt early on that it's not a matter of just throwing websites at people, but making sure they get what they need, delivered in a culturally appropriate way."

Bedside manner

Cannock CAB in Staffordshire works with Hospital Radio Stafford, targeting advice direct to patients' bedsides at both Staffordshire General and Cannock Chase hospitals. Once a month, presenter Sheila Yard does her 'ward rounds', taking music requests from patients and asking whether they have any problems the CAB can help with. "We used to prepare the questions ourselves," says Sam Catchpole, deputy manager at

Brain power

The Combined Hospitals CAB in Salford has a successful partnership with Brain and Spinal Injury Charity (BASIC), targeting advice at people with brain and spinal injuries, including those recovering from severe head injuries or other brain-related conditions, like strokes or brain cancer. The service combines BASIC's specialist understanding of neurological and spinal conditions with CAB advice skills and clients appreciate an advice worker who has an understanding of their disability and its effects. "When people have suffered a brain injury or are diagnosed with a neurological condition that affects their cognitive processes, short term memory loss and confusion mean that handling a benefits claim or navigating your way through the community care system presents huge obstacles," says adviser Ann Monk. "The needs of this particular client group aren't always understood, so we handle a lot of appeals against refused claims for various disability benefits."

Cannock CAB. "Now we ask patients what they want to hear about and so the advice tends to be much less general and much more personal."

Targeting disability

In partnership with Age Concern Carlisle and the Disability Association of Carlisle and Eden (DACE), Carlisle CAB in Cumbria has set up an advice centre on the large Raffles housing estate in Carlisle, an

area of high deprivation.

"A survey of residents told us that what they really wanted was an advice service on their doorstep," says CAB manager Andy Auld. "Pooling resources has meant we have been able to provide a really effective one-stop shop-style advice service. When the bureau sees a client who might be eligible for disability benefits, it refers them to DACE colleagues. "Our combined experience means we jointly tackle the injustice and discrimination that people with disabilities can sometimes face," says Andy.

"We tackle the injustice and discrimination that people with disabilities face."

DACE manager, Fred Wilenius, agrees. "The three organisations working closely together is a really good development because of the wide range of advice and information we've been able to offer local people."



Advice for a new generation

Political will

Citizens Advice needs the support of politicians to make its vision of using integrated advice services to tackle health inequalities a reality. Birmingham and Wales lead from the front.

Over a third of Birmingham CAB's work is based in health settings. The service runs 14 'health units', bringing in nearly £2 million in increased income for clients in 2004⁷. Four local PCTs fund around 70 per cent of the CAB health units' work, to deliver a number of advice sessions in 46 GP surgeries. Some advisers are based within the community mental health teams and others work with patients receiving palliative care. There are outreach sessions for drug-users at the charity Turning Point's Drugline premises and for people with HIV/Aids, in partnership with the charity, Freshwinds.

Young hearts

The Neighbourhood Renewal Fund also pays for CAB advice services targeted at the city's hospitals. Adviser Tina Holden works with Heartlands Hospital in Birmingham, offering advice to expecting teenage parents and their families attending the 4U Parent Craft Group. "Much of the work is on benefits and housing," says Tina. Many of Tina's clients have never claimed benefits and

Bright future



Gemma and her young son Jamie

Seventeen-year-old Gemma Nicholls was 32 weeks pregnant when she was referred to see CAB adviser Tina. "I went to see Tina to find out if we were entitled to any benefits," says Gemma, whose partner works full-time as a tool fitter. "We were not due much but do get child tax and working tax credit, plus child benefit. Tina was really helpful. "

don't know what they can get, where they get them from and when. "It can be a very scary time in a young person's life," says Tina.

Peaceful endings

Another important element of the Birmingham CAB hospital work is advising people - and the carers of

people - diagnosed with terminal illnesses. Adviser Kashmir Sanghera is based in the palliative care unit at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital. "I see people who have been given a very poor prognosis, who have only six months or less of life ahead of them," says Kashmir, who takes referrals from the social work team, clinical staff and Macmillan clinical nurse specialists.

"Supporting the carers is an important part of the work."

Employment issues are common. "People often decide to give up work as soon as they hear a bad prognosis. That isn't always the best thing, not least because they lose their employment rights and there are implications for their pension," says Kashmir.

Supporting the carers is an important part of Kashmir's work. A client's file is not closed, even after their death, until the client's carers have had all the advice and support they need. "We help them to assess their own changed situation."

Viv Rees and Paul Connolly of Bridgend CAB, which offers outreach services in five different health settings across Bridgend borough, including hospitals, day-centres and mental health clinics, as part of the Welsh Assembly-funded Better Advice, Better Health initiative.

⁷ Birmingham CAB, 2003-04.

Vital support

Paul Jennings Chief Executive of North Birmingham PCT said, "There is now general agreement, backed by hard evidence, on the contribution that good welfare advice can have on the health and well being of the individual. The big issues that influence our health are still education, housing and income; along with smoking, exercise and diet. The CAB work has demonstrated again and again its ability to help citizens with these big issues. We are proud of the leadership we have given for this approach."

Better Advice, Better Health

Through Better Advice, Better Health, Citizens Advice Bureaux deliver coordinated generalist and welfare advice through GP surgeries and other health settings across Wales.

"The political commitment has been there from the start."

Piloted in seven areas of Wales in 2001-02, Better Advice, Better Health was rolled out to all 22 Local Health Board areas

a year later and now has a recurring budget from the National Assembly Government. "The political commitment to make the initiative work has been there from the start," says project coordinator Delyth Owens of Citizens Advice Cymru. "That's made it much easier for us to work closely, in a coordinated way, with regional service providers and local primary health teams."

By December 2004, the service had seen in excess of 18,000 clients and had generated

almost £11 million for clients in confirmed benefits, at a cost of £2.8 million.

On your marks

Monitoring and evaluation is important to all parties, including the National Assembly. Feedback from health professionals has also been very encouraging, with over 70 per cent of GPs reporting that the project saved them a lot of time and had taken a lot of work off their shoulders.⁸

"One of the most important results for us was that a significant majority of GPs (over 60 per cent) felt that our advice work in their surgeries led to an improvement in their patients' health and helped them cope with chronic illness," says Delyth. "After all, that's what it's all about."

⁸ Final Evaluation Report, University of Bangor, March 2004.



Last word



Health is about more than health services, says Public Health Minister, Caroline Flint MP.

I am very pleased to welcome the publication of *Prescribing advice*. It documents the invaluable work being done by Citizens Advice Bureaux staff and volunteers to improve health and tackle health inequalities. It shows how better advice means better physical and mental health. Health is about more than health services. The national health inequalities strategy - *the Programme for Action* - and the *Choosing Health* white paper underline the link between health and access to services, particularly for people

in disadvantaged groups and areas, whether NHS, employment or housing services. Likewise, the changes that have been made to the tax and benefit systems are designed to improve the lives and health of families as well as tackle poverty among children and older people. Tackling health inequalities requires action on a broad front to address the needs of people and their families. Citizens Advice Bureaux provide people with a bridge to these services and benefits. Locating advice and support within NHS primary care and other services has been very effective, with beneficial results on people's lives and their health. I look forward to this vital work continuing and contributing to our overall efforts to improve health and reduce health inequalities.



Working together will help make the NHS less of a sickness service and more of a health service, says Sir Nigel Crisp, Chief Executive of the NHS.

The Citizens Advice projects featured in *Prescribing advice* show the real impact that strategic partnerships between Health and Social Care providers, PCTs, local authorities and other agencies can have on people's health and in tackling the health inequalities that we know exist. I was particularly pleased to see the work that is being done in East London with people from black and minority ethnic communities, who we know can experience problems in accessing mental health services.



Citizens Advice Bureaux have a significant role to play, says Dr Fiona Adshead, deputy chief medical officer at the Department of Health and project lead on the *Choosing Health* white paper.

Along with other partners, Citizens Advice Bureaux have a significant role to play [in tackling the wider social issues that affect people's health]. The white paper emphasises the importance of community action to improve health and the significant role that

communities can play in promoting individual self-esteem, mental well-being and in reducing exclusion. So we are supporting a stronger role for community-based organisations in delivering NHS and social care services. Citizens Advice Bureaux, that have built up an extensive network of services in GP surgeries and health centres, hospitals and clinics, are well-placed to provide advice on the wider issues that affect health and well-being and health inequalities. There may be opportunities to link this work to specific initiatives flagged up in the white paper, to tackle social exclusion.

Citizens Advice Bureaux have a real understanding of their local communities and can play an important role, working with local health planners and other agencies, in identifying gaps in the service. Working together at local level to ensure that effective interventions and resources are targeted to those in greatest need will help us make the NHS less of a sickness service and more of a health service.