

# 1 UNIT

## How to use this unit

## THE ROLE OF THE CHC MEMBER

### You need:

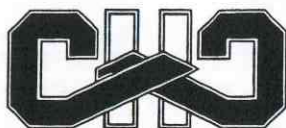
- the Handbook for CHC Members
- the Code of Conduct for CHC Members
- pen and paper

You need half an hour to an hour, preferably at one go, to work through the Unit. (You may find you work faster or slower than this: it doesn't matter, as long as you feel confident with what you have learned).

If you are uncertain about anything in the Unit, discuss it with your Chief Officer, or your Tutor if you have one.

## Contents

1. What the CHC is
2. Your contribution
3. What do CHC members do?
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5. Being accountable
6. Getting help



**Check Your  
Understanding**

**Read**

**1. What the CHC is**

The Handbook for CHC Members, Section 1

Which of these statements do you think best describes CHCs?

A: They are there to help Health Authorities  
and NHS Trusts to plan their services

☐

B: They help dissatisfied patients complain  
about NHS services

☐

C: They help local communities to voice their views  
about health services

☐

D: They are there to monitor the effects of the Government's  
changes in the Health Service

☐

**Answer**

All four statements are true to some extent; but C is the nearest to a general statement about CHCs.

This is because:

A: CHCs have a right to be consulted by Health Authorities and hope to influence their planning; but the main allegiance of the CHC is to patients rather than professionals.

B: CHC staff do deal with complaints; but the CHC also has a much wider role in monitoring services and finding out concerns. (Not everyone who is unhappy makes a complaint.)

D: Even before the changes now going on, CHCs had a role: they monitor all kinds of health care provision in the NHS. They aim to identify and call attention to issues that are important to their community, whether or not there is a political debate around them.

**To Find  
Out More**

Read more of your Handbook, especially sections 1 and 2.

Talk to your Chief Officer or Tutor.

## Becoming a CHC Member

## What You Bring to the CHC

### 2. Your contribution

People become CHC members for all sorts of reasons:

*"I was in hospital for some time and that got me thinking more about the health service."*

*"I belong to a local disability group, and it made sense to link it in to the CHC, because we have concerns in common."*

*"I wanted to make sure the needs of people like me don't get forgotten."*

*"I'm on the local authority, and these days there seem to be more and more areas where we have to work together."*

*"I was nominated by another group where I'm on the committee, and I didn't know much about the CHC to start with."*

Whichever is true for you, we hope this Unit and the rest of your training will help you see how you can use your particular skills and experience in the CHC, and make your time as a member worthwhile.

The NHS Executive has drawn up a 'specification' for new CHC members. The NHS Executive hopes members will meet most of the following criteria:

- A keen interest in health and healthcare and commitment to the NHS.
- Enthusiasm, willingness and commitment to making an important contribution to your local community.
- A commitment to public service and its values of accountability, probity and openness (see also CHC members Code of Conduct).
- The availability to give the equivalent of on average at least three days per month and to attend daytime, evening, and, occasionally, weekend meetings, visits or other activities.
- The ability to consider and discuss a range of written materials.
- An understanding of the needs of your local community, particularly the issues affecting groups such as minority ethnic groups, older people, people with learning disabilities or mental health problems, women or people with HIV/AIDS.
- Some experience of using your local health service (eg family doctor, local health clinic or hospital) or close involvement with other people who use health services eg as a carer, friend or relative, or as a member of a voluntary organisation or user group.
- The ability to get on well with a range of people, and win both the confidence to question NHS managers and the sensitivity to gain the respect and trust of health service users.
- Some experience of working in groups, formally or informally.

**List**

all the ways in which YOU meet this person specification. Include experience you have had in your personal life, or as a volunteer, as well as skills or knowledge you have gained at work.

**How I meet the person specification:**

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Any skills or experience you have which are not listed, but that you think could be useful:

These are your qualifications for getting the job of CHC member. CHCs need people with a wide range of life- and work- experience, in order to operate effectively and represent the whole community. Your contribution counts!

## **Gaps You May Want to Fill**

List here any gaps in your experience and skills that you are aware of. You are not expected to know everything; but you may feel that you'd be more effective as a member if you had more knowledge, or confidence, in a particular area.

### **Gaps I want to fill**

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## **What To Do**

You may already know how you can learn more about some of these points (eg talking to friends or fellow-members; reading).

If not, discuss the opportunities available with your Chief Officer or Tutor.

**Here is a List****3. What do CHC members do?**

of activities that the CHC as a whole (members, chair or staff) might get involved in. Tick all the ones that you think are part of your role as a member.

Attend CHC meetings

☐

Take part in CHC committees

☐

Take up complaints by local people

☐

Visit hospitals to monitor services

☐

Visit GP practices to monitor services

☐

Liaise with other groups in the community

☐

Comment on Health Authority and Trust plans

☐

Organise public meetings

☐

Talk about the CHC on TV and radio

☐

Attend Health Authority meetings

☐

Organise protests about hospital closures

☐

## Answers

There is no simple right answer to this. Different members will contribute in different ways, according to the needs of the CHC and the particular skills of the member.

Clearly every member needs to attend the main CHC meetings. Where the CHC delegates work on specialised topics to committees, most members are likely to take part. Commenting on plans drawn up by the Health Authority and Trusts is also a regular function for the whole CHC.

Other activities, such as monitoring services, attending Health Authority meetings, and liaising with community groups, will involve some but not all members. You will need to find out your CHC's priorities for the year, and the activities planned, to see how you can contribute.

Finally, one or two activities on the list are unlikely to come your way. Dealing with complaints about the Health Service is delicate and complex, and CHC staff, not members, take on this work. (Members who hear about potential complaints refer them to the Chief Officer.) It is also more likely that the Chair or the Chief Officer will speak for the CHC on TV and radio.

## Talk Through

this list with your Chief Officer, so that you know what is expected in your particular CHC.



**Case Study****4. Some dilemmas for CHC members**

Sharon Nugent is an active member of HEALTH CARE, a local pressure group campaigning against cuts on health services. She's joined the CHC as well, as another way of influencing local policy.

When the Accident and Emergency ward in the district hospital is about to close, HEALTH CARE organises a week of protests, with a picket outside, a candle-lit vigil, and other activities. They inform the local radio station, and Sharon is invited for an interview.

Should she:

1. Agree, and emphasise that she represents the CHC as well as HEALTH CARE? Y/N
2. Agree, and use the information the CHC has collected to make her point? Y/N
3. Agree, but make it clear on air that she's speaking for HEALTH CARE not for the CHC? Y/N
4. Resign from the CHC if she's going to get such coverage in another role? Y/N
5. Suggest they interview someone else from HEALTH CARE, so as not to compromise the CHC? Y/N

Any other advice you would give Sharon?

**Answer**

Before she decides, Sharon needs to know exactly what the CHC's position is on the closure. If the CHC is not opposing closure, she could choose (3). She will need to work out what to say if she's asked what the CHC thinks. If the CHC is also against the closure, Sharon could still choose (3); or (2), as long as she has the CHC's permission to use any unpublished information.

She should also tell the Chief Officer that she's been invited to take part, so that s/he can respond to any queries.

## Points to Note

Most CHC members have other concerns and interests outside the CHC. The point is not to hide this, but to be clear which role you are playing, especially in public.

Would Sharon's decision need to be different if she were the Chair of the CHC?

## Case Study

Liam O'Donnell was nominated to the CHC by the local carers group, where he is a committee member. At the first few meetings, Liam felt he could only speak on matters that directly concerned carers. After a while, though, with encouragement from the CHC Chair, he became more involved in other issues.

At the last CHC meeting, there was a heated debate on maternity services in the district. The local press covered the meeting, and Liam was quoted. Several of his fellow carers group members phoned him afterwards to say that he was not mandated to vote in the way he did; and one of them has written to the Chair of the carers group to ask for Liam to be forced to resign.

Was Liam wrong? Why?

## Answer

Liam wasn't wrong to speak without a mandate from the group that nominated him.

CHC members, however they became members, are there as individuals, not as delegates of a group or community. They may want to tell the CHC what the group's view is: but they are not bound by it, and they are free to speak on any matter. (Liam might have been wise to make this clear to the carers group from the beginning.)

## Read

The Handbook for CHC Members and the Code of Conduct for CHC Members.

## 5. Being accountable

As a CHC member, who do you think you are accountable to?  
(ie who do you have to account for your actions to?)

Tick

as many as you think apply

- the Health Secretary ☐
- the NHS Executive ☐
- the local authority that nominated you  
(where applicable) ☐
- the community or voluntary organisation  
that nominated you (where applicable) ☐
- the section of the community you are closest to (eg people  
with disabilities; users of a particular service; your own  
ethnic community) ☐
- the whole local community ☐
- ACHCEW (the association of CHCs) ☐
- the CHC you belong to ☐

Answers

- the whole local community
- the CHC you belong to

It is important to distinguish between the **personal sense of responsibility** you may feel, towards your own part of the community, say; and your **actual accountability** as a CHC member. Many CHC members feel a great sense of responsibility towards a particular section of the community, and go to great pains to ensure that they reflect those needs in any CHC discussions. This is a vital way in which the CHC can take account of the different needs within the whole community, and especially of the needs of people who do not normally have a voice.

At the same time, all CHC members share the CHC's need to be accountable to the whole community, with all its diverse needs and viewpoints.

## 6. Getting help

Being a CHC member is a complex and demanding business, and nobody is expected to know everything all the time. If you feel you need more information, or clarification of an issue that's arisen, or guidance with your role, ask the staff at the CHC office. Their role is to ensure that the CHC can function effectively, and that includes supporting members in their work.

Check what arrangements there are for supporting you as you work through this pack. There may already be issues you want to discuss, with other members or the staff.

We hope you find your role as a CHC member rewarding and challenging.