



'Can Do' for Veterans

Alternate case story for

'Can Do' for Young Mothers

Carolyn: Young Wife of a Veteran

Case story

I'm worried about Amanda. She's had this temperature for three days now. I think it's her ears – she keeps pulling them. She's two now but she still wakes at night and whinges a lot and it's twice as bad when she's sick. She just won't let up. Her father, he can't stand it. He's a great Dad but then he has his bad days when he can't deal with any stress. You can't predict it. I don't like to leave her with him because you never know how he'll go.

Most of the time though you can feel it coming. My Dad was a Vet too so I guess I know the drill. He gets the nightmares and the sweats. And there's the drinking. You walk on eggshells. I take Amanda out to the playground all day sometimes but I always ending up spending money when I do that. Other times, I just put her in the cot and close the door. It's better to keep her out of his way when he's down. She sees stuff and she gets frightened. I'm trying to look after both of them.

It was easier when we were still in the service because I had my girlfriends and their kids and you could meet and have a few wines and a smoke and share chocolate around. Since he got discharged and we moved here, it's hard to meet people. Nobody understands. People said we'd make friends easily in the city but it's really lonely. If you tell them anything they always just say, 'Why don't you leave him. Just leave him.' But he's sick and I love him. You don't leave someone just because they're sick.

I end up drinking on my own and I know that's not good. Some days you don't even want to get up but you have to. I'm scared he'll find out how much money I'm spending on booze and smokes (sometimes I go without food because I'm too short to feed us all) – he'd kill me if he knew.

Points for discussion

1. What are the important issues here for Carolyn and Amanda?
2. If Carolyn were telling you her story how could you and your service help?
3. What are the risks and what assessments might you make?
4. How would you prioritise the risks to Carolyn and to Amanda?
5. What interventions might be useful at this consultation?
6. What other longer term strategies could be considered?
7. What could VVCS services add that your service cannot offer?
8. What support could other local health and community services offer at this point and how would you access them?

Facilitator's notes

Story Vignette – feedback session

- The points for discussion are to trigger group discussion.
- Use the whiteboard to write up main ideas.
- The facilitator's notes below are to direct discussion and prompt further explanation of important issues.
- Ensure only one participant speaks at a time and is heard by the entire group. Be aware of who is speaking and who is not.
- Invite participation from everyone.
- Reflect and if necessary rephrase the participant's comment to link its relevance to the topic.

Be sure to allow the different aspects of care on offer from the various service providers in the room. Encourage them to think about how these fit together. E.g. a youth service may be able to offer a number of services but how would they link up with a GP and put the family into contact with VVCS? Do they know what a GP can offer and how they can refer to specialist mental health services if necessary? Ask a GP participant to explain and to talk about the use of care plans and referral pathways when working with patients with mental health and substance use problems.

Facilitator's trigger questions

- Discuss Carolyn's story – what other history would participants need to obtain to get a full picture?
- There are a number of issues presented in this vignette – encourage participants to *prioritise* the risks that Carolyn and Amanda face and to develop short and longer term strategies to assist her.
- Make it clear that Carolyn's situation cannot be sorted out in one consultation – she needs longer term support.
- Does Carolyn want her partner involved – would this be appropriate?
- Consider domestic violence as an issue here and what the duty of care is in this regard.
- How is her parents' behaviour affecting Amanda? Consider whether she is in need of protection.
- Ask participants how they would engage with Carolyn to encourage her to make some changes that may benefit her health and that of her daughter.
- Discuss the risks and effects of her alcohol use on her mental health?
- Does Carolyn need help with financial matters?
- Consider the range of local services that may be able to support Carolyn and her family and explore the role of VVCS in particular.