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AUTISM

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AUTISM POLICY & PROCEDURE

1. PURPOSE

- 1.1 To help staff including Agency Workers identify and provide person-centred support to people who may be living with autism or under the umbrella of an autistic spectrum disorder.
- 1.2 To provide individualised, safe, and supportive care for people who may be living with autism.
- 1.3 To meet the Key Lines of Enquiry and relevant Quality Statements as set out by the Care Quality Commission (CQC).
- 1.4 To comply with relevant legislation:
 - Autism Act 2009
 - The Care Act 2014
 - Equality Act 2010
 - The Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014
 - Mental Capacity Act 2005
 - Mental Health Act 1983
 - Health and Care Act 2022

2. OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 To provide a framework of supportive care for people with an autistic spectrum disorder that promotes choice and control over their own lives.
- 2.2 To ensure that staff including Agency Workers working with people with autism have an understanding of autistic spectrum disorders in order to provide effective individualised support.

3. POLICY

3.1 What is Autism?

Autism is a lifelong neurodevelopmental condition, the core features of which are persistent difficulties in social interaction and communication and the presence of stereotypic (rigid and repetitive behaviours), resistance to change or restricted interests. (NICE 2021)

Autism is neither a learning disability nor a mental health problem. However, mental health problems can be more common amongst people with autism, and it is estimated that one in three people with a learning disability also has autism.

There are other names for autism which are used by some people, such as:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) – The medical name for autism
- Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) – Used instead of ASD by some people
- Asperger's (or Asperger syndrome) – Describes autistic people with average or above average intelligence (although it is no longer used as a diagnostic term) and is now likely to be described as HFA (High-Functioning Autism)

- 3.2 Staff including Agency Workers will be alert to signs that someone may have an autistic spectrum disorder.

These signs may include the following:

- Difficulty in interpreting facial expressions or gestures
- Difficulty forming any friendships
- Intolerance of new stimuli such as sights, sounds, smells
- Inability to sympathise with other people
- Difficulty in making needs known to others
- Having an intense interest in one specialist area to the exclusion of others
- Repeating the same phrases and behaviours
- Over-reliance on the same routine, and not being able to tolerate changes to plans
- Sleep problems and experiencing anxiety

- 3.3 Staff including Agency Workers will be aware of the needs of service users in their care with autism; in particular, that they are more likely to have other additional mental and physical disorders and may find it more difficult to understand and access services without support.
- 3.4 All staff including Agency Workers working with service users with autism will work in partnership with other professionals, informal carers, family members, and legal representatives as appropriate.
- 3.5 Service Users will receive a comprehensive assessment of their communication needs, physical health, psychological wellbeing, and social circumstances. This assessment supports the identification of possible indicators of autism and its management.

Where potential indicators are identified, with Service User's consent (or in line with best-interest decision-making where applicable), the commissioning body will be informed and an appropriate referral requested to enable formal assessment, diagnosis, and specialist support by the relevant qualified professionals.

- 3.6 Staff including Agency Workers will monitor and record aspects of physical and mental health. Any concerns will be shared with commissioners by the Clinical Lead
- 3.7 The Government has also introduced a requirement for CQC registered service providers to ensure their staff including Agency Workers receive learning disability and autism training appropriate to their role.

This is to ensure the health and social care workforce has the right skills and knowledge to provide safe, compassionate, and informed Care to autistic people and people with a learning disability.

This requirement is set out in the Health and Care Act 2022.

- 3.8 Staff including Agency Workers receive basic awareness training in accordance with national guidance and the requirements of:

- The Autism Act 2009
- The Adult Autism Strategy in England (Department of Health 2015)
- The National Strategy for Autistic Children, Young People and Adults: 2021 to 2026

In addition, for any identified needs of the Service Users, Nursing Direct will ensure supplementary training is provided to staff including Agency Workers to support those needs.

- 3.9 The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has produced guidelines for working with children (CG123) and adults (CG142) with autism. These guidelines are downloadable from the NICE website.

All staff including Agency Workers working with adults with autism will follow the principles outlined in the NICE guidance:

- Be respectful when offering care and support
- Take time to build trusting relationships
- Work at the Service User's own pace and understanding

- 3.10 Staff including Agency Workers are aware of guidance on particular issues related to people with autistic spectrum disorders contained in the Mental Health Act 1983: Code of Practice.

It is noted that autistic spectrum conditions are included in the Act's definition of mental disorder. Nursing Direct supports the Government's proposals to reform the Mental Health Act. Importantly, for autistic people, this includes:

- Changing the definition of 'mental disorder' in the Mental Health Act so that it no longer includes autism

4. PROCEDURE

4.1 General Guidelines

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) has produced guidelines for treating and managing autism and these guidelines will be followed by staff including Agency Workers who may be caring for someone who may have autism:

- Where the Service User is living with possible autism, staff including Agency Workers must be aware of the process for referral for assessment, which would include referral to the Service User's GP, and for an assessment of need under the Care Act 2014
- Where the Service User has received a diagnosis of autism, staff including Agency Workers must be aware of care pathways in their area for people in their care
- Offer information in a format that is easily accessible and understandable for the Service User
- Consideration will be given to whether the Service User would benefit from access to a suitably trained advocate. Where advocacy support is identified as beneficial, this will be discussed with the Service User (and/or their representative where appropriate) and escalated to the commissioning body to request the implementation of appropriate advocacy referrals.
- Offer information on self-help, support groups, or one-to-one support, and provide support to the Service User where required so that they can access this support
- Assess the physical environment where the Service User receives care in terms of personal space, decor, lighting, and noise in relation to any impact on the Service User and suggest appropriate changes where practicable
- Be alert to any physical health issues, lack of physical activity or changes in eating and drinking and report these to the Service User's GP if there are concerns
- Maintain awareness of difficulties regarding social interaction and offer support to the Service User, where appropriate, in making or supporting friendships and relationships

4.2 Main Signs of Autism

It is advisory that staff including Agency Workers visit the NHS website for common signs of autism.

4.3 Care Plans

Only staff including Agency Workers trained in autistic spectrum disorders must undertake an assessment of communication, physical, mental, and emotional health needs and use a Care Plan format that will be reviewed on a regular basis.

Service users with autism may find themselves excluded from opportunities for education, employment and training, and helping to provide access to these must be part of the Care Plan process, with the following considerations:

- Including effective communication, verbal or non-verbal, interacting in situations such as 1:1 or communal and community settings, cognitive and motor abilities, learning style, communication needs, and literacy ability
- Additional communication needs such as sensory, echolalia, hearing and sight loss
- Use of communication aids such as social stories, signs and symbols, the Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS), Makaton, British Sign Language (BSL), objects of reference and photos. This is not an exhaustive guide, but it is essential that communication plans detail all identified needs of the Service User

Potential Risks

Behaviours

- What behaviours are usually observed and if known, what they indicate and how to respond to them. Link to PBS (Positive Behaviour Support) plans and ABC charts
- Any identified routines, obsessions, behaviour How to rule out other unknown causes
- Redirection techniques including rewards, sensory activities
- Sensory needs, such as noisy environments, busy areas, too bright, enclosed, for example, and how these affect the individual
- Eating and drinking and any support required including additional diagnoses such as Pica
- Activities which should include likes, dislikes, planning (such as transport), risks, and any contingency plans
- Accessible information resources such as easy reads, communication passports, health action plans

Staff including Agency Workers can also view further information in the Care Plan and in the suite of policies and procedures at Nursing Direct.

The National Autistic Society also produces a range of information and resources that staff including Agency Workers at Nursing Direct will find useful when supporting someone with autism.

4.4 Risks

Autism presents potential risk to the mental and physical wellbeing of the person, including the following:

- Vulnerability in relationships
- Conflict with others who do not understand the nature of the autism
- Poor sleep patterns
- Poor diet
- Risks to family relationships

If staff including Agency Workers believe someone they are working with is at risk of harm, they must share that information with Nursing Direct, in line with local safeguarding procedures.

Safeguarding is everyone's business and staff including Agency Workers and the person themselves must be involved with any concerns about welfare.

Nursing Direct will ensure that, as part of its Care Plan process, the required risk assessments are in place, and these are monitored and reviewed in a timely manner.

Risk management must not be seen as the elimination of risk. There are risks for everyone in all walks of life, and to try and eliminate them would result in a loss of independence and choice, so risk management must be seen in the context of positive risk-taking.

Best practice describes the importance of a collaborative approach to managing risk, involving the Service User and all staff including Agency Workers, so that trusting relationships are developed that aid communication.

4.5 Person-Centred Care

Nursing Direct ensures that staff including Agency Workers get to know each Service User well and therefore have an understanding of changes that may impact them and cause distress. These could include but are not limited to:

- Changes in the time of planned support or visits
- Changes in rota
- Changes to routine or planned activities
- Nursing Direct ensures that it has measures in place to reduce stress and matches understanding and confident staff including Agency Workers with Service Users.

4.6 Mental Capacity

Where the Service User with autism is unable to take certain decisions or choices regarding their care and support, those decisions must be taken for that Service User in accordance with the principles of the Mental Capacity Act 2005 and best interest process.

Staff including Agency Workers can refer to the Mental Capacity Act (MCA) 2005 Policy and Procedure at Nursing Direct.

4.7 Learning and Development

Nursing Direct will ensure that all staff including Agency Workers have autism training. Staff including Agency Workers may need additional training according to each Service User's specific needs. Please use a reflective training record to help to embed the learning.

5. DEFINITIONS

5.1 All staff including Agency Workers

5.1.1 Staff

Denotes the employees of Nursing Direct Healthcare Limited.

5.1.2 Agency Workers

Refers to individuals who are contracted with Nursdoc Limited or another employment business as an Agency Worker (temporary worker) provided to Nursing Direct Healthcare Limited to perform care services under the direction of Nursing Direct.

5.2 Nursing Direct

Nursing Direct, also known as Nursing Direct Healthcare Limited, is the entity regulated by the CQC (Care Quality Commission) and responsible for the care service provision, contracted to provide homecare services to service users in their homes, in placements, essential healthcare facilities and in the community.

5.3 Nursdoc Limited

As the sister company to Nursing Direct Healthcare Limited, Nursdoc Limited acts as an employment business, specialising in providing staffing solutions to the healthcare sector.

5.4 CQC (Care Quality Commission)

CQC throughout this policy, the term "CQC" refers to the Care Quality Commission (CQC) which is the independent regulator of health and social care in England.

5.5 Echolalia

Someone with echolalia might only be able to repeat a question rather than answer it. In many cases, echolalia is an attempt to communicate, learn language or practise language

People with echolalia repeat noises and phrases that they hear. They may not be able to communicate effectively because they struggle to express their own thoughts

5.6 Picture Communication Systems (PECS)

A communication system designed to teach functional communication

OUTSTANDING PRACTICE

To be "outstanding" in this policy area you could provide evidence that:

- Information is provided in accessible formats to help people understand their care and support
- Nursing Direct implements a number of innovative ways to demonstrate that it works with people to help them achieve their maximum potential
- Nursing Direct uses innovation such as 'what do you like?' cards to find out more about how people with autism experience the world through their senses. Knowing how people respond to sights and sounds, textures, touch, and smell helps staff including Agency Workers to communicate and work effectively with people using the service
- Support provided is individualised to the Service User's personal preferences, needs, and cultural identities. People's likes, dislikes and how they like things done are explored and incorporated into their Care Plans
- Nursing Direct considers the use of colour in its setting, including but not limited to, uniform, rooms, and objects
- All staff including Agency Workers complete the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism

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SIGNED:	 Marc Stiff – Group Managing Director