

A Guide to Direct Payments for General Practitioners

Do you have any patients who are disabled people and are in need of some kind of daily support or care and find it difficult to get or want more independence?

Yes I do have a few I can think of.

If this is the case have you heard of something called “Direct Payments”?

I have heard of it, but I am not quite sure what it means or how it works.

“Direct Payments” is a system in which a disabled person can receive money from their local authority social services in order to pay for any care support which they need on a daily or weekly basis. It has now become one of the Governments Key Performance Indicators, and they are very keen to promote it. It first came in with the Community Care Direct Payments Act in 1996, and since then its Regulations and Practice and Policy guide lines have been regularly updated.

The majority of disabled people who have used Direct Payments have been very satisfied with them, and many talk about how it has made such a big change in their lives. Direct Payments is not only available for physically disabled people, but also sensory disabled people, people with learning disabilities, mental health service users, young and old disabled people and parents of disabled children.

So how does all this work?

It really all is quite straight forward. If you know of a patient who is struggling because of the lack of enough care or wants to live independently, then all you have to do is to tell them to contact their local social services area office, and ask for a social worker to come and give them a Community Care assessment on their needs. The social worker will then carry out this assessment in partnership with the disabled person, who will know what they need, and then submit this assessment to a panel who will agree to a final decision to it if it is a genuine need. The person will then be allocated the amount of funding agreed to cover their assessed needs.

When the Care Manager or Social Worker assesses you, they then calculate how much money you will need for your Direct Payments scheme. If this goes beyond £200 per week, they will then contact the Independent Living Fund, which is a Fund that helps social services provide any top up that might be needed above the social services ceiling. Before the disabled person starts the scheme, they need to set up a separate Direct Payments bank account, so the money does not get mixed up with ones own personal account money. This also means that it is easier to keep records of ones own account in order to be accountable, as one is using public money.

When the Direct Payments support package is agreed with the disabled person, a contract of agreement is then signed by both parties.

What does the disabled person then need to do?

The social worker should advise the disabled person how they need to organise their Direct Payments. Alternatively they could get in touch with their local Direct Payment

Scheme support worker, or a local disability organisation, who can advise them how best to proceed. This usually works very well, as the support workers are trained specifically to help people access Direct Payments and give them advice in terms of how they can run their own schemes.

What is so good about Direct Payments is that it allows disabled people to have more control and choice over their lives. This is why many disabled people feel that Direct Payments changes their lives considerably.

Direct Payments are a means to an end and the end should be Independent Living which gives the individual much more freedom and spontaneity as well as responsibility. Disabled People can buy in the help and assistance they require for their everyday needs and support, and organise it in the way that they want and they feel best, without any interference from social workers or social services generally.

Direct Payments helps Disabled People to do things for themselves instead of relying on services directly from the Local Authority Social Services. This means that they can organise their care around the times they need it, and not fit in to the social services time table, where the service is often provided at inappropriate times. In practical terms the disabled person can arrange when they can get up and go to bed, and when they want to eat and do things generally. This way they can do things as they want without fitting in to any rigid routines set up by others.

Direct Payments helps to empower Disabled People and give them more independence, flexibility and better quality of life. This usually means their health tends to be better too.

How do the disabled people find people or carers to work for them?

The disabled person usually calls the person working for them “personal assistants” or “support workers”, as the term Carers tends to be old fashioned these days. It also has a derogatory connotation with the emphasis of being “cared for” or “looked after”, which places the disabled person in a very passive and submissive position and role. This is in contradiction because Direct Payments users tend to be in control and directing how they organise their lives

Disabled people recruit their personal assistants in a number of different ways which could be either through word of mouth, advertisement, job centre, agency or even on the Internet. Many disabled people do the recruiting themselves and others use disability organisations or agencies.

Many Direct Payments Support Schemes offer training for users to help them familiarize themselves with the recruitment process and employment legislation generally. Some people might have had experience of this in their working lives, but to others it could be entirely new, so it is a new skill that needs developing. These training courses can cover recruitment procedures like drawing up job descriptions, advertisements and contracts etc., as well as developing interviewing skills and learning how to deploy and direct their personal assistants, and if necessary what to do if they need to ‘fire’ them.

Who Can Receive Direct Payments?

Direct Payments is available for any Disabled Person who is considered to be “able and willing” to run their own scheme. This includes physically and sensory disabled people,

people with learning disabilities, people with HIV and Aids, people with mental health backgrounds, older people, 16 – 18 year olds disabled individuals and carers. However, it does not mean that the disabled person needs to run the whole scheme themselves. They can get someone to help manage it with them, and accountants to keep their accounts and do their wages. People with learning disabilities and mental health service users, can also have people working as advocates and support workers to assist them run their scheme.

What are the Advantages?

It provides more control and choice in the lives of Disabled People. They are more flexible, and provide more freedom and less restriction in ones life.

The Disabled Person is the employer, and therefore one is not dependent on Social Services. Most people who use Direct Payments, find much more user satisfaction, and an improvement in the quality of their lives.

What Kind of Support do People get on Direct Payments?

If you do receive Direct Payments, you do not have to do everything by yourself, and can get support.

Support can come from Direct Payments Support workers in your area, disabled peoples organisations, and other voluntary organisations, and special Direct Payments support schemes.

This support can provide help in advice and information. They can help you do your wages and accounts by providing a payroll system. They can also cover Advocacy or other

people supporting you with your scheme. Other disabled people who have run their own schemes can also help you.

Where did Direct Payments come from originally?

Disabled people came up with Direct Payments first. It was because a group of young disabled people living in a residential home did not want to live there for the rest of their lives, and wanted to live independently in the community just like everybody else, in ordinary houses and streets. They wanted to be part of the community and not separated and isolated in the country side, away from the zest of life. They negotiated with their local authorities who were sponsoring them to live in residential care, to transfer the money they needed directly to them, so they could organize their support. This is how it started. In fact this was the beginning of Independent Living in this country.

In those early days because it was so new, they were known as Independent Living Schemes. This meant they had more control and choice and independence in their lives. Disabled People designed, developed and pioneered Independent Living and Direct Payments. This was done in partnership with Social Services Departments. They have now become known as Direct Payment schemes.

Did you say there was a Direct Payments Act?

Yes, Direct Payments became law with the introduction of the Direct Payments Act in 1996. This Act now provides a duty for Local Authorities to implement Direct Payments.

This Act came about after many years of lobbying by Disabled Peoples organisations and their supporters. It was officially implemented in April 1997. However many

Disabled People operated their own Direct Payments Schemes in this Country for a lot longer going back to the early 1980's, but were then called Independent Living Schemes or Self Operated Care Schemes.

Are there any other sources of information where one can find out more about Direct Payments?

There are now many publications, resources and websites available now, which provide good information and guidance to help you set up your scheme. There is also much information on Direct Payments on the Internet.

The National Centre for Independent Living (NCIL) can help provide this information for you, or direct you to other organizations in your area, who are experts in the Direct Payments field. NCIL website: www.ncil.org.uk

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November 2004.