

Welcome to Volume 31 edition 1 of *Research, Policy and Planning*.

The first paper in edition 1 comes from **Wesam Darawsheh and Gill Chard**. Their paper is based on qualitative research interviews with occupational therapists working in culturally diverse areas of London. It challenges widely held views of social work and allied health professionals that independence is always an appropriate goal for practitioners to aim for when working with service users, arguing instead that interdependence – with family members or the wider local community – may offer a valuable alternative goal in culturally diverse practice, where cultural competence may require practitioners to work within wider family and social networks and to acknowledge the reality of interdependence in the lives of clients. Though drawing on experiences derived from multi-cultural practice, the issues raised resonate with contemporary debates in social work and social policy.

The second paper is from **John McLean**, who considers the new role of the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) in social care. NICE has for a number of years played a leading role in promoting evidence based medicine – reviewing and synthesising research on the impact and effectiveness of medical interventions to ensure that clinical practice is based on robust evidence of ‘what works’ – and that ineffective interventions and practices are discarded. Readers may also know that since 2012, this role has extended to social care. McLean’s paper describes the process NICE has adopted in developing evidence based guidelines to inform social care practice. Though drawing attention to shortcomings in the quality and range of research findings available to social care practitioners, the paper is not, as readers might assume, driven exclusively by the epistemologies of the natural sciences used in medicine, but acknowledges the relevance of different kinds of knowledge generated from research in social care.

Paper three, from **Derek King, Linda Pickard, Nicola Brimblecombe and Martin Knapp**, examines evidence relating to the number of carers whose employment may be at risk because of their caring responsibilities. This is an important topic. Unpaid carers provide the vast majority of ‘hands on’ care in the UK and it is difficult for many carers of working age and in employment to juggle their twin responsibilities as carers and workers. Carers who resign or prematurely retire to care for someone frequently experience poverty and social isolation, and their skills and productivity are lost to the workforce. King *et al.* re-analyse data from the 2011 Census and the ONS Survey of Carers in Households (2009-10) to overturn a widely held view that only those providing care for 20 or more hours a week experienced problems in maintaining full employment. Their evidence suggests the threshold for risks to employment is much lower, and that carers providing as little as 10 or more hours a week may be at risk of loss of employment. Evidence from this paper could be used by Adult Social Care departments to offer more targeted support to carers to enable them to continue working.

The fourth and final paper is from **Colin Slasberg, Peter Beresford and Peter Schofield** and examines the relationship between new legislation (in the form of the 2014 Care Act) and pre-existing policies relating to self-directed support and personal budgets. There remains a far-from-settled consensus as to the value of personal budgets and direct payments (at least within academic and policy communities) and Slasberg *et al.* have been at the forefront of debates, both here in this journal and elsewhere. (See the reviews section in this edition for more about this). Their paper begins with a lively critique of the third national POET survey to argue for an alternative to the current model of self-directed support enshrined in policy, drawing attention to opportunities afforded by the Care Act to achieve this. (This approach is described more fully elsewhere in another paper by the authors published earlier this year in *Disability and Society*.)

Last but far from least, Reviews Editor, Paul Dolan, offers, as usual, a series of entertaining and informative reviews of recently published books on topics ranging from critical debates in social work, ethics, the Munro Report and its aftermath, Baby P, and personalisation.

Finally, we hope you will be interested in the forthcoming second edition of this volume of the journal. This next edition, which we hope to publish very shortly, will be sponsored by the Social Care Evidence in Practice project led by the Personal Social Services Research Unit at the London School of Economics and Political Science, with support from the NIHR School for Social Care Research and funding from LSE's Higher Educational Innovation Fund. The Guest Editor for this edition will be Dr Michael Hill, who is a Visiting Professor of Social Policy at the Personal Social Services Research Unit.

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