

The Carer Support Needs Assessment Tool

The Carer Support Needs Assessment Tool (CSNAT[®]) is an evidence based tool designed for carers supporting a family member/friend at home towards the end of life. The research underpinning this tool was informed by carers and practitioners.^{1,2} The CSNAT comprises 14 domains (broad topic areas) in which carers commonly say they require support. Carers may use this tool to indicate further support they need in relation to supporting someone at home.*

The CSNAT approach

The CSNAT approach is a process which provides carers with the opportunity to consider, express and prioritise any support needs they have and to discuss these needs with a practitioner. The 'assessment conversation' forms the basis for subsequent action planning.

*The process of assessment is **facilitated** by the practitioner and **led** by the carer*

Facilitating the CSNAT approach

The CSNAT approach has a number of stages; each stage facilitated by the practitioner. At all stages the carer is given the opportunity to say what is most important to them, at that moment in time, and what they feel would help support them.

Stage 1: Introduction

How and when the CSNAT is introduced to the carer will vary depending on the patient and carer circumstances. Practitioners have found the CSNAT most beneficial when introduced to the carer at an early stage. Timely assessment of needs can facilitate early resolution of concerns and potentially reduce the need for 'crisis management'.

The key messages to convey to the carer, at the point of introduction, are that:

- This is the start of an assessment process that will be ongoing
- The purpose is to determine their individual support needs (as distinct from the patient's)
- The CSNAT is something for them to look at and consider as it highlights the kinds of support others in their circumstances have needed

*It is important that the carer perceives the CSNAT as an **opportunity** to consider their needs, **not an obligation** to 'fill in a form'*

*CSNAT Tool available on request as a separate document

1 Ewing, G & Grande G - on behalf of the NAHH (2012) Development of a Carer Support Needs Assessment Tool (CSNAT) for end-of-life care practice at home: A qualitative study. *Palliative Medicine*, 27(3) 244 – 256.

2 Ewing G, Brundle C, Payne S and Grande G (2013) The Carer Support Needs Assessment Tool (CSNAT) for use in palliative and end-of-life care at home; A validation study. *Journal for Pain and Symptom Management*, 44(3) 395 – 405.

Stage 2: Carer's consideration of needs

Following the introduction of the CSNAT the carer may need time to consider their needs. The length of time needed will vary, according to the individual. However, the practitioner needs to reassure the carer that they will have the opportunity to discuss their support needs (i.e. at the assessment conversation).

The format of the CSNAT enables the carer to indicate their support needs, and the degree of support they need. The carer may record this information whilst they are considering their needs; some carers may wish to do this during their conversation with the practitioner.

The carer's support needs will differ from those of the patient. The carer therefore needs time to look at the CSNAT and reflect on their individual support needs

Stage 3: Assessment conversation

The assessment conversation takes place once the carer has had the opportunity to consider their support needs. The CSNAT provides a framework for carers to express and prioritise their support needs. The assessment conversation facilitates deeper exploration of the domains highlighted as priorities by the carer. The practitioner can help the carer to reflect on their support needs/and possible sources of support by identifying:

- Which support needs are most pressing for the carer at this moment in time (their priorities)
- What the **carer** feels would help them in relation to these support needs
- Support the carer may already have access to (e.g. via family members, friends, support agencies)
- Support the carer needs assistance to access (e.g. by the practitioner signposting/referring to services available)
- Support needs it may not be possible to meet (at least in the short term)

*The **assessment conversation** allows the carer to express and prioritise their needs and indicate the support they would find helpful. This conversation can be used as the basis for **shared action planning***

Stage 4: Shared action plan

The assessment conversation forms a basis for shared action planning which is then recorded. Documentation relating to the action plan summarises:

- Any actions the carer plans to take to access support (self help)
- Any actions the practitioner will take to facilitate support (deliver themselves or signpost/refer to other sources of support)
- Plans for review of the assessment (to be agreed between the carer and the practitioner)
- Any support needs resolved as part of the assessment process (e.g. by providing information)

Stage 5: Shared review

Review of the carer's support needs is likely to be ongoing. However, there may be certain critical moments at which a full reassessment of the carer's support needs is beneficial (for example, a marked change in circumstances). The prompt for a review may therefore come from the carer or the practitioner.

*Assessment is an **ongoing process** that will require continuing review as the carer's support needs change*