

Getting it right

Assessments for black and minority ethnic carers and service users

Supplementary written material for Mr and Mrs Choy — part one

Mr Choy (77) and his wife, Mrs Choy (74), live in a sheltered housing complex that specifically caters for the needs of Chinese older people in Edinburgh. Each resident has their own flat but there are also communal facilities such as the residents' kitchen and lounge. The housing complex also has on site warden support but this is only available between the hours of 9 am to 5 pm.

In 1966 Mr Choy left his family in Hong Kong to come and work in Scotland. He secured employment in the catering industry initially as a kitchen assistant and later as a chef.

Mrs Choy remained in Hong Kong with their two young children but found the separation very difficult and was subsequently hospitalised on several occasions to receive in-patient psychiatric care. Mr Choy was forced to return to Hong Kong in 1970 to care for his wife and young family as her mental health had severely deteriorated. He remained in Hong Kong for six months. Despite ongoing mental health problems during their separation no formal diagnosis of her illness was ever given.

Mrs Choy and the two young children aged 6 and 12 moved to Scotland in 1972 to join her husband. Mrs Choy's mental health problems continued and Mr Choy had to provide the bulk of care to his children as Mrs Choy was unable to cope. This was in addition to his job as a chef in a Chinese restaurant. However, the family saw this as a period of relative stability until 1982 when her mental health illness manifested itself in violent behaviour and the family had to call the police. Since then, Mrs Choy has been repeatedly admitted to hospital for psychiatric care.

Mr Choy has become more and more concerned as, in addition to the 'usual' behaviour exhibited when his wife is unwell, he has noticed that she is becoming increasingly forgetful and suspicious of his

friendships with other people, particularly women. Her behaviour towards visitors is hostile and she often accuses them of stealing from her. Mr Choy has noticed that she has taken to hiding various items around the house, including money, and then cannot remember where she has put them. Mr Choy finds his wife's behaviour distressing and embarrassing particularly as a bible study group of their friends and fellow congregation members meet regularly at their home. Mr Choy is concerned that word of his wife's illness and behaviour will get out into the wider community.

Mrs Choy's physical health is also failing. Her mobility has decreased significantly and she has been taken into hospital for tests to identify the cause.

Mr Choy retired from his job at the age of 56 due to his own health problems and his wife's deteriorating mental and physical health.

Mr Choy looks after his wife on his own and receives very little help from either the statutory or voluntary sector. Meals on wheels is provided 2 days per week by the social work department and Mr and Mrs Wong both attend a voluntary sector lunch club when Mrs Choy's health permits. His son lives nearby in Edinburgh but has a fulltime job and a young family to look after. Despite the length of time they have resided in the United Kingdom, both Mr and Mrs Wong speak no English.

Mr Choy is himself in poor health. He has a hearing impairment and relies on a hearing aid. His eyesight is also poor due to a cataract in one eye and will require surgery to correct this in the near future. He is also showing signs of stress due to his caring situation.

Due to his wife's poor health he is responsible for all the household tasks in addition to providing personal care, emotional and social support for his wife. Mr Choy is reluctant to leave his wife on her own for any length of time as he is very worried about what might happen in his absence. Moreover as Mrs Choy becomes very agitated in unfamiliar surroundings, Mr Choy himself is effectively housebound.

Mr Choy's son is very concerned about the situation. Whilst he visits his parents as much as possible and provides support to his father, he feels that more must be done to help them.