

# Experiences of the 'Nearest Relative' provisions in the compulsory detention of people under the Mental Health Act: a rapid systematic review

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## Plain English summary

### 'Nearest Relative' provisions in compulsory detention

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## Plain English summary

If people with severe mental health problems are assessed or treated against their will, the Mental Health Act 1983 states that a relative or carer should be appointed as the 'Nearest Relative'. This means that the relative or carer will receive important information and be involved in decisions about the person who is unwell. The Nearest Relative is an important but controversial role, with some perceived flaws in the way they are selected, the powers they have and the sensitive information they receive. We were asked to undertake a review of evidence to try to understand the experiences of people involved with the Nearest Relative provisions of the Mental Health Act 1983.

We carried out a thorough systematic search for any studies or reports about people's experiences of the Nearest Relative. There were not many sources of evidence, but there were enough for us to develop an understanding of the sorts of issues that might be encountered when people are detained under the Mental Health Act and a Nearest Relative is allocated.

One key finding was that it would be better for service users to be actively involved in choosing their Nearest Relative. However, this choice can have a significant impact on family and carer relationships. Professionals involved in the treatment of people with mental illness are in a position to be able to help service users and the Nearest Relative deal with the pressure and responsibilities they will face in this situation. The law was seen as being very complex and hard to understand by most people.

There was little recent evidence to inform this important and complex discussion; however, the findings of this rapid review provide specific examples of issues that many individuals may experience. More research is needed in the area if we are to better understand the complex issues involved.

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