The Carers’ Alert Thermometer (CAT) is an evidence-based alert tool designed to identify and triage the needs of people who are providing support to a family member or friend at home as an unpaid carer. Originally developed for use with unpaid carers providing end of life care at home it is now being used with carers who are providing support to patients with a range of long-term and progressive conditions, as well as those receiving palliative and end of life care.

Since the launch of the CAT in September 2014, over 300 individuals from 13 countries have registered to access the CAT and over 5,000 visits have been made to the CAT website www.edgehill.ac.uk/carers. The tool has been recommended for use by health and social care providers to identify the needs of unpaid carers by organisations in the UK, Canada and Australia.

WHAT’S NEW?

An updated version of the CAT(v2) is now available online with accompanying resources, including videos to help organisations to implement the CAT. If you are interested in using the CAT tool to triage the needs of unpaid carers you support, or work with, please see the website for registration and how to contact the team.

The team have been working closely with UK organisations such as The Clatterbridge Cancer Centre and The Motor Neurone Disease Association (MNDA) to implement the CAT throughout their organisation, and with teams overseas. Two doctoral students, Lynne Kettell and Emmie Malewezi, are working on development of the CAT for use with young carers and carers of stroke survivors to triage the specific needs of these groups. Many articles have been published on the development of the CAT for a range of audiences, including the BMC Palliative Care, Journal of Advanced Nursing, UK Stroke Forum and e-hospice. Links to these publications and presentations can all be found on the CAT website.

Lynne Kettell (PhD student/ Graduate Teaching Assistant at Edge Hill Faculty of Health and Social Care) There are approximately 215,000 young carers in the UK, who provide unpaid care such as housework, personal care and emotional support to family members. The aim of my PhD research is to identify areas of burden experienced by young carers aged 11-18 of a family member with a progressive illness and develop a Carers’ Alert Thermometer for Young Carers (CAT-YC). Although progressive illnesses can include mental illnesses, my research will focus on young carers of a family member with a physical progressive illness. This is because young carers looking after a parent with a progressive mental illness are likely to be assessed under different legislation, requiring different support and interventions. Based on the principles of the original CAT for adult carers, the CAT-YC will be developed collaboratively with young carers, and will act as a short screening tool to triage them to appropriate support, or a full comprehensive assessment of needs.

Emmie Malewezi (PhD student/ Graduate Teaching Assistant at Edge Hill Faculty of Health and Social Care and stroke nurse) Every year in the United Kingdom (UK) approximately 152,000 people suffer a stroke. At present, there are nearly 1.2 million stroke survivors living in the UK. The effects of stroke to individuals varies depending on the part of the brain that is affected. Nevertheless, the common effects include: limb weakness usually to one side of the body, problems with thinking and memory, difficulties with speaking and in some cases bladder and bowel dysfunction. The majority of stroke survivors rely on family carers to provide assistance with their activities of daily living ranging from physical help to psychological support. The needs of the family carers are however not always met and they often experience high levels of burden resulting in deterioration of their health and wellbeing. Early identification of the family carers’ needs and support is, therefore, important in order to sustain their caring role. The aim of my PhD project is to adapt the CAT specifically for use with family carers who support stroke survivors to be called CAT-S.

For more information please visit www.edgehill.ac.uk/carers
The Motor Neurone Disease (MND) Association has good evidence about the impact of MND on carers and we are continually reviewing the type and level of support that we offer to relieve some of the stress and pressures of this demanding role. The Carers Alert Thermometer (CAT) is proving to be a useful tool for identifying carers’ needs, enabling us to increase our support if necessary and signpost the carer to other services. We are working to roll the use of the CAT tool out more widely across England, Wales and Northern Ireland, to help us support and reach out to even more carers in the future.

Hilary Fairfield, Regional Development Manager for the South, Motor Neurone Disease Association.

“I am a former Carer who looked after an elderly relative from advent of disability through to end of life which pretty much encompasses most situations likely to arise. Whilst I cannot promise to relieve your individual situation I can offer a pointer to a service that was NOT available at the time I was coping with the end of life of my “loved one“. For far too long carers have been left to “get on with it”, but now there is a new way of addressing the difficult situation carers can/do find themselves in with Carers’ Alert Thermometer (CAT). Due to my involvement in the work at Edge Hill University I was one of many carers invited to contribute to the design of the CAT. It has been designed to keep questions to a minimum, reducing your time needed to answer, whilst identifying any needs you have and provide suggestions of services or sources of support that would be best suited to your situation. I recommend that all those working with carers explore the use of the CAT in their work and that carers tell others about it. The CAT, resources and information about its development can all be found on this website.” John (former carer)

WHO’S WHO? (L to R)
Professor Brenda Roe (Professor of Health Research)
Dr Katherine Knighting (Senior Research Fellow)
Professor Barbara Jack (Principal Investigator, Director of the EPRC)
Professor Mary O’Brien (Professor of Supportive and Palliative Care)

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