

Saturday 30 April 2005

Untangle 'Your Rights to NHS Health Care':

Age Concern gives older people the tools to cut through the red tape

Inconsistent and confusing rules, complex forms, and no easy route to finding out what's free and what you'll have to pay for - this is the reality for thousands of older people when they are ill and need to use basic NHS services.

Unfortunately, there isn't a 'magna carta' where older people's entitlements to NHS care are set out. That's why Age Concern is today (Saturday 30 April) launching ***Your Rights to Health Care***, the first ever reference book to decode the system and outline all the main rights to health care for over 60s, with no jargon and no frills.

As much as 41% of the Health Service budget is spent on the over 60s, who need care, but older people say they feel in the dark about their rights to basic NHS services, including eye care, dentistry and chiropody. This can be distressing at a time when older people are ill and at their most worried and vulnerable.

Your Rights to Health Care is a unique and all-inclusive guide to help older people through the maze of your NHS entitlements. Though it is aimed at the over 60s, the majority of rights to NHS care covered applies to adults of all ages. The book details: rights to dental treatment, eye care, hearing services, therapy, chiropody, and entitlements when you go in and come out of hospital, and if you move abroad.

Dental charges are still bewildering so many older people don't know which treatments are free. Painfully, older people are often shown their bill after treatment, without being offered the chance to find out the price first. And that's if they can even get to their nearest NHS dentist.

Form-filling is another obstacle for many low-income pensioners. A barrage of forms awaits any older person on a low income, who wants to get money off their bill for glasses or contacts. Plus most people don't know that ill or disabled people can ask for a sight test at home.

Gordon Lishman, Director General of Age Concern said: "Older people are the NHS's biggest customers, but are most likely to get stuck in its red tape. They've contributed to the system, throughout their working lives, and they have a right to access NHS services when they need them. We urge older people to keep on top of their rights so they don't lose out."

Your Rights to Health Care is the essential guide to all older people's main entitlements to health care - from dentistry and chiropody, to therapies and your rights when you go into hospital and come out. It also includes a step-by-step guide to making a complaint about the NHS.

To grab your copy, please telephone Age Concern books on **0870 4422120**.