

Caring Through Frailty

Insights from carers across Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and the wider ICB footprint

Michele Stokes, CEO, Carers in Hertfordshire
Harriet Opalinski, CEO, Carers in Bedfordshire

Supporting people with frailty often relies on the dedication, resilience and compassion of unpaid carers. In this session, we will share carers' experiences, challenges and insights, highlighting the vital role they play in helping people live well and independently for longer.

**Giving carers a voice. Sharing real experiences. System Change.
Improving outcomes together.**



The Cohort

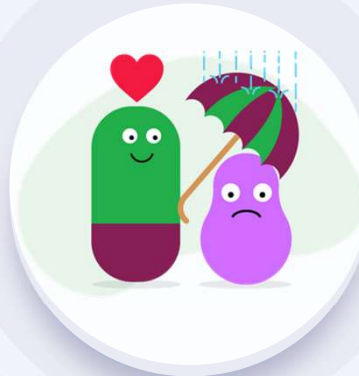
Who are the carers and frailty populations

Family Carers Roles

They provide essential daily care including medication, mobility support, and healthcare communication.

Diverse Carer Demographics

Carers include spouses, adult children, young carers, and parent carers managing care alongside other responsibilities.



Health Engagement

Carers often act as key decision-makers during hospital discharge and ongoing care planning.

Frailty Population

The frailty population includes individuals with complex long-term health conditions like dementia and stroke needing daily support.

Understanding the role of unpaid carers

Frailty does not only affect the person with frailty. It also affects the unpaid carer who often holds the care plan together at home, in primary care and during hospital admission.

The Problem

The Invisible workforce



Unpaid carers provide vital support for those with frailty, illness, or mental health challenges, greatly aiding health systems and communities.

Early Recognition



Early identification of carers is essential for effective frailty care and improves patient outcomes while easing pressure on health services.

Risk of Carer Burnout



Without adequate support, carers risk burnout, which negatively impacts both their wellbeing and the stability of those they care for.

Best Practice Models



Structured identification and intervention models can transform experiences for carers and patients by integrating support within health systems.

CARERS IN HERTFORDSHIRE

We exist to ensure unpaid carers are recognised, valued and supported, with access to information, advice, peer support and opportunities to influence services and maintain a life beyond caring.

CONNECT

Proactive Prevention - 90% of carers had an increase in overall wellbeing score, 91% of carers had an increase in overall resilience score,

A GATEWAY TO SUPPORT

Connecting carers to support reduces the likelihood of carer breakdown

Connecting Carers to each other improves resilience and increases confidence

"I can't thank you enough for reaching out to me. Before you got in touch I was alone and didn't know what support was available. Having regular contact, advice and support has been invaluable. I now know there are groups, dementia nurses and support for me, but just having regular calls has been enough."

SUPPORT

Make a Difference: average of £262 produces an average meaningful positive change of 72%
Dementia Nurses: 79.9% meaningful positive change in carer well being

NOT JUST A PLUS ONE

Access to Support Information, advice and support help carers access services earlier and reduce health inequalities.

Health and Wellbeing support reduces isolation, builds resilience and helps carers maintain their mental and physical wellbeing.

Evidence shows that connecting adult carers with support improves access to wellbeing services and helps maintain health and wellbeing. Early engagement can reduce health inequalities, while peer support helps reduce isolation, which is associated with poorer mental and physical health outcomes

INFLUENCE

Bringing organisations together to support carers to make sure support is joined up

VALUING CARERS

Influencing carers to not always put themselves last influences carers to feel valued and improves carers own health

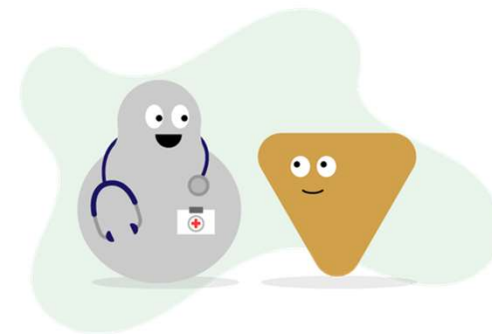
working with carers to take part in the design and delivery of services increases levels of engagement

Giving carers a voice in shaping services improves recognition, access to support and responsiveness to need. This can reduce isolation, increase confidence and resilience, and contribute to improved mental wellbeing.

"I was surprised that the amount of help and support existed, and when I was at my wits end and very stressed, they were very helpful as I couldn't see the wood for the trees"

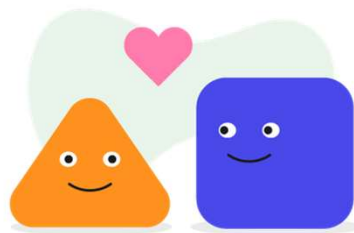
System Change: GP referral pathway and text message pilot

A simple digital solution with significant system-wide impact. By embedding an automated referral pathway within SystmOne, carers can be identified by trusted healthcare professionals and referred directly to their local carers organisation at the click of a button. The process ensures unpaid carers are recognised as partners in care rather than remaining hidden within the health system, meaning they can care with support.



The Impact for carers

- Carers feel recognised, valued and acknowledged as part of the care team.
- Carers are identified by a trusted healthcare professional, increasing confidence and engagement.
- Faster access to emotional, practical and financial support.
- Earlier intervention helps prevent carer stress, burnout and crisis.



The Benefits for Primary Care

- Reduced administrative burden on practice staff.
- Automatic referral process ensures consistent identification and support.
- Improved quality and accuracy of carer records and coding.
- Supports achievement of local and national carer identification requirements.
- Greater assurance that identified carers receive support without additional practice follow-up.
- Frees up clinical time for patient care.

GP Text Message Pilot

What did we do?

A simple, scalable population health approach to find carers not presenting for help that links identification to action, not just coding, referral and support

Dear x, we want to identify patients who are also unpaid carers. If you have a friend or family member that relies on you for some of their care then let us know so we can update your record and direct you to local services.

Please complete questionnaire: xxxx

Patient themselves providing care - 224484003 SNOMED CODE - Covers all categories

No. of carers coded		
Before (June 2024)	After (July 2024)	Impact
164	283	72% increase

1.
Caudwell Medical Centre is updating our patient records. We want to identify our patients who are also unpaid carers.

A carer is anyone, including children and adults who looks after a family member, partner or friend who needs help because of their illness, frailty, disability, a mental health condition or an addiction and cannot cope without their support. The care they give is unpaid.

☒ Do you care for someone who couldn't manage without you? YES

☐ Do you care for someone who couldn't manage without you? NO

Continue

Intervention Example: Health Check Nurse embedded into Carers Organisation

A Whole-Family Approach to Annual Health Checks: Supporting Carers and People with Serious Mental Illness

- Joint health checks for the carer and cared-for person provided a more holistic understanding of family health needs and caring pressures.
- Limited GP follow-up on community-based health checks highlighted the importance of integrated pathways and shared clinical systems.
- Lack of access to SystmOne meant clinicians could not always see previous health history, reducing opportunities for informed decision-making.
- A significant number of carers had never received an NHS health check despite being eligible, revealing unmet need and hidden health inequalities within the carer population.

Case Study

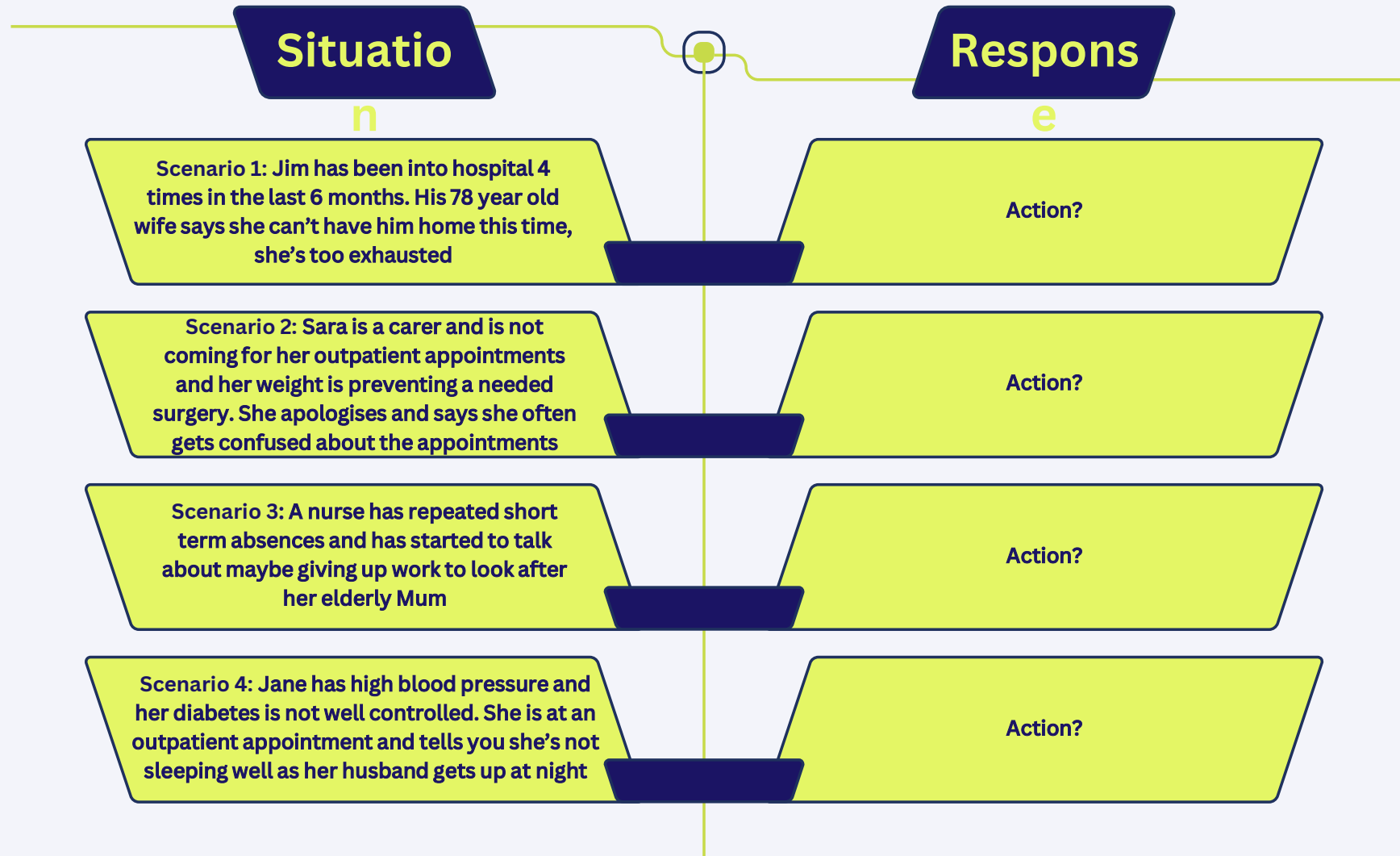
In one home visit, a daughter with severe mental illness initially appeared unlikely to engage with a health check, but through a relational approach during her parents' assessment she joined the conversation and agreed to have her own health check.



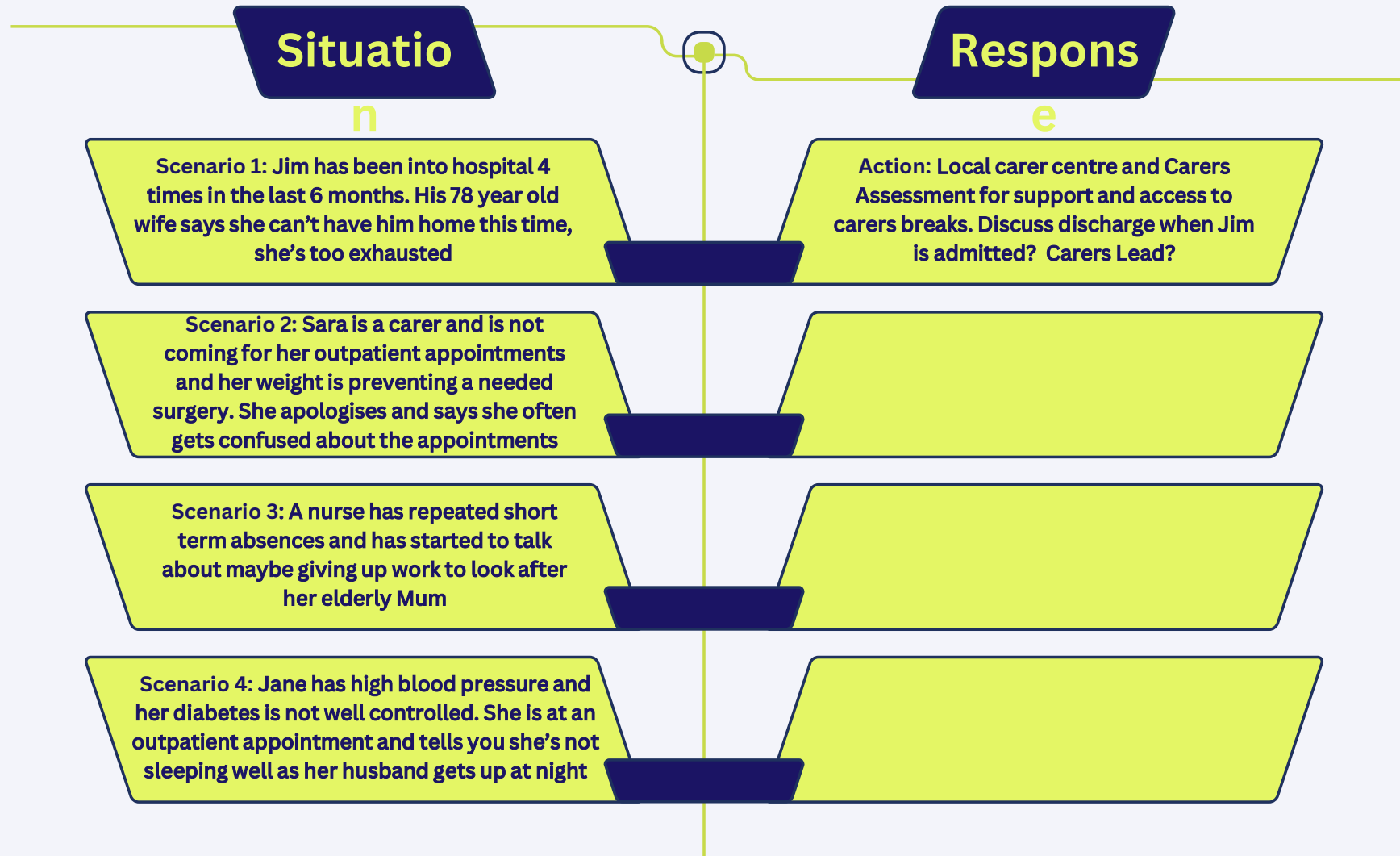
The Impact

The health check was not just a clinical intervention. It was a trust-building opportunity. It identified hidden health risks, opened conversations about wellbeing, and connected carers back into primary care before crisis point.

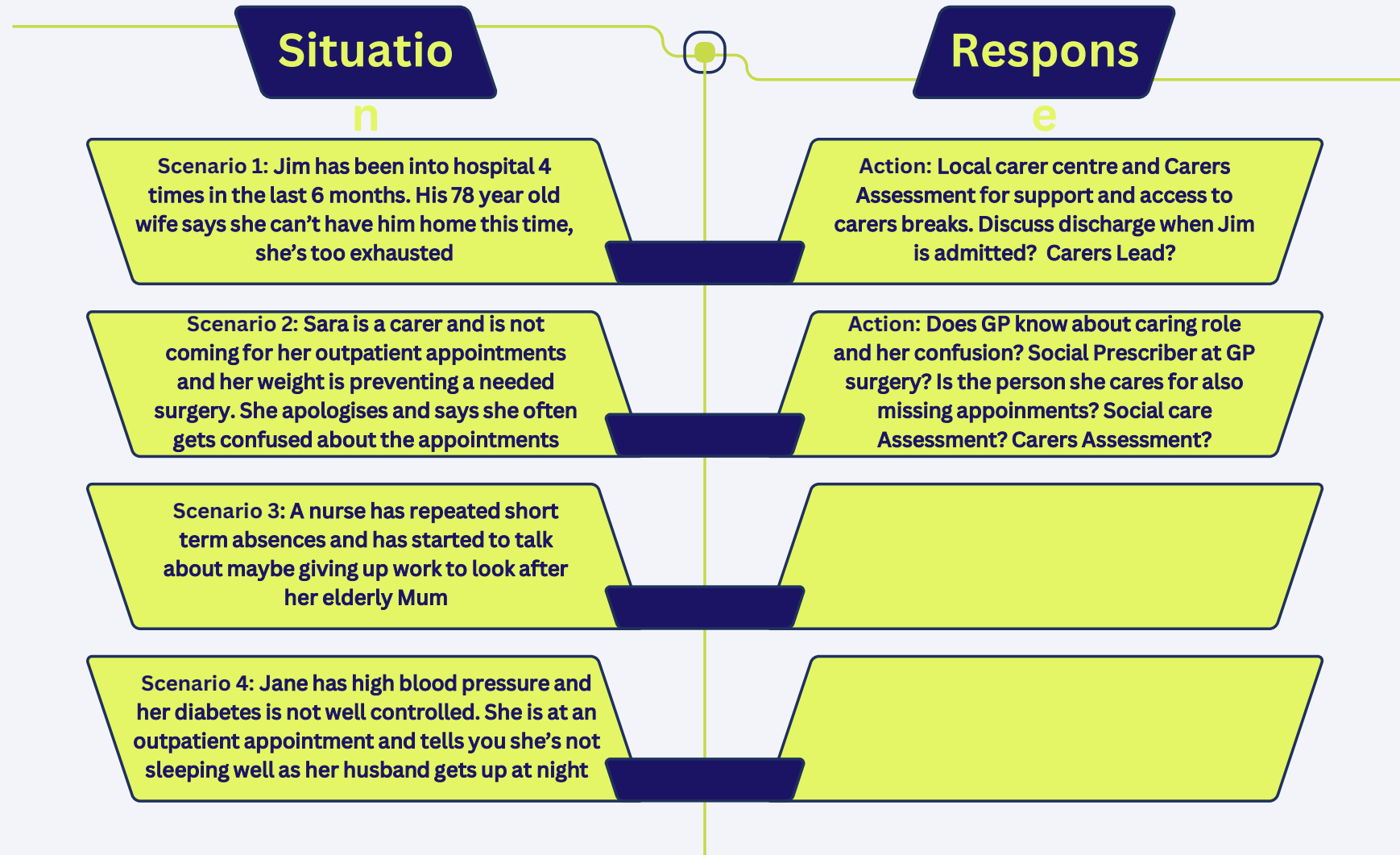
But what can we do?



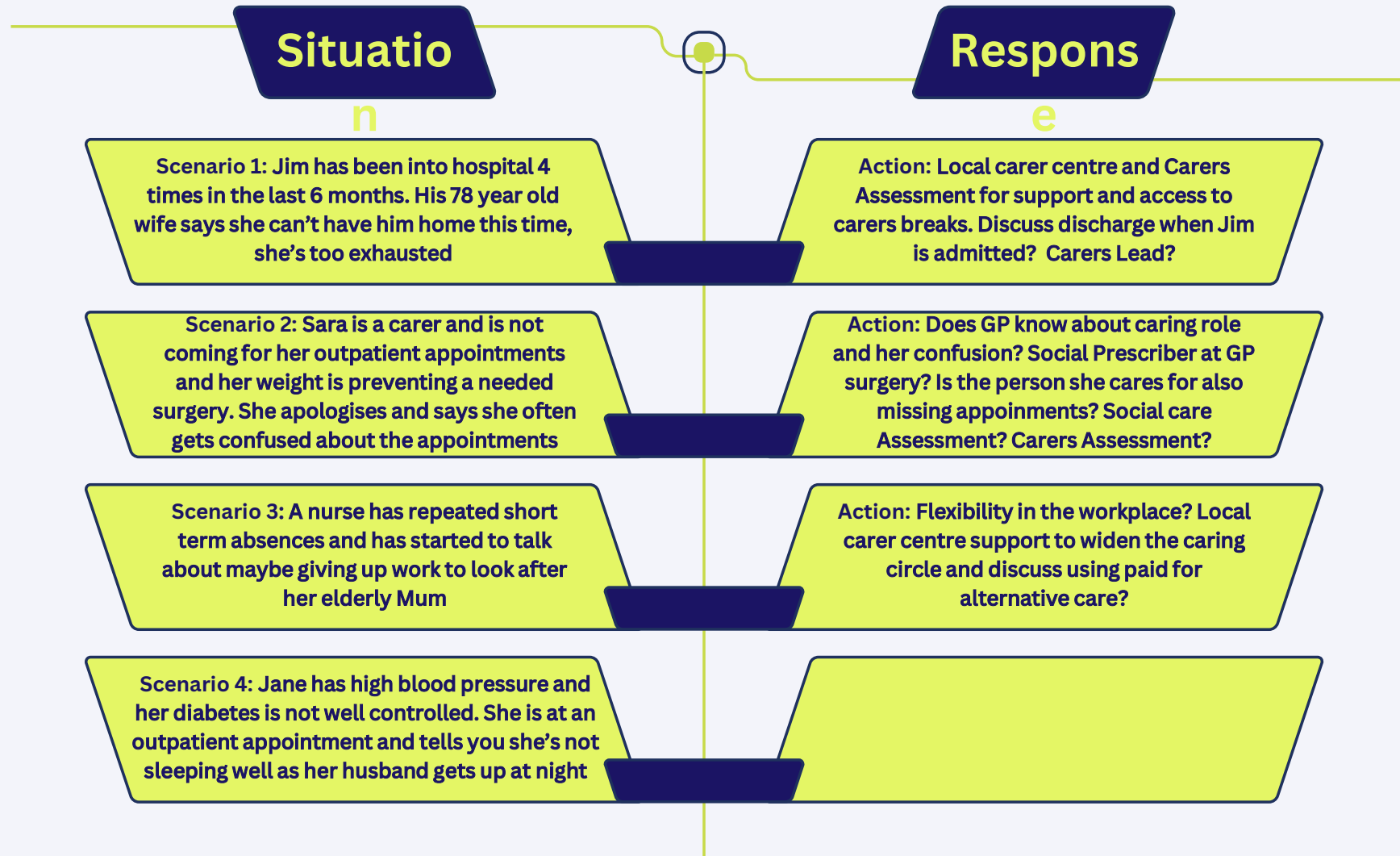
But what can we do?



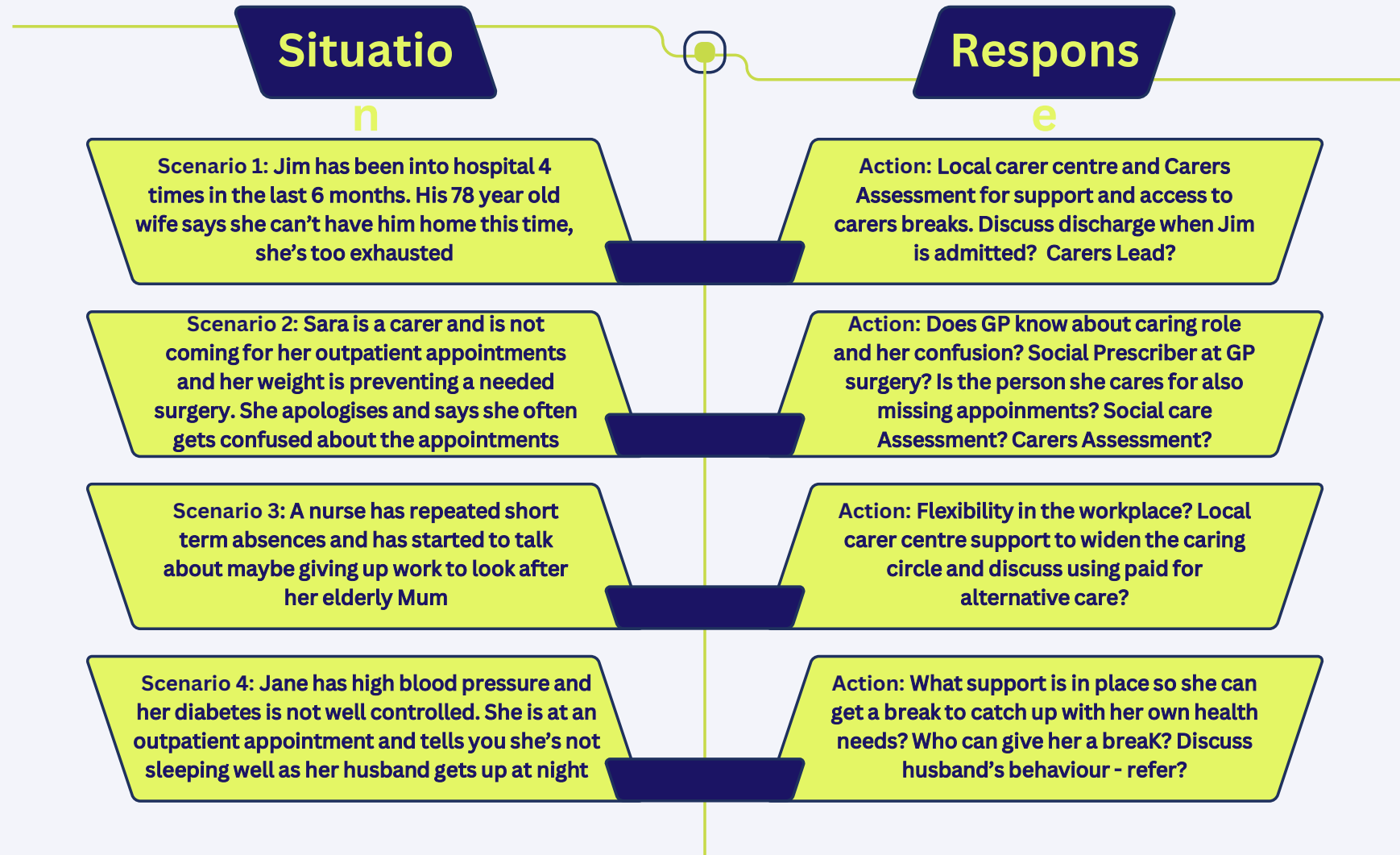
But what can we do?



But what can we do?



But what can we do?



But what can we do?

CARERS ARE
PARTNERS IN CARE

CARERS ARE
PATIENTS TOO

1 IN 3 NHS STAFF
ARE CARERS

IMPROVING HEALTH OUTCOMES
FOR CARERS

"Our starting point was simple: if the carer is not identified, they cannot be supported; and if the carer breaks down, the frailty care plan often breaks down with them."



Carers
in bedfordshire

Carers
in Hertfordshire
charity registration number 1085491

Key Takeaways

Key elements to adapt or adopt

