

SPECIALIST HEALTHCARE SUPPORT TO OLDER RESIDENTS OF CARE HOMES: MODELS AND COSTS

PSSRU

Outline of a research project funded by BUPA

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BACKGROUND The Personal Social Services Research Unit (PSSRU) at the University of Manchester has received funding from BUPA to investigate the provision of specialist healthcare support for the physical healthcare needs of older people resident in care homes. Older care home residents have multiple and complex needs, including significant undetected yet treatable conditions. Despite this, their medical care is typically entrusted to already heavily burdened general practitioners, only a minority of whom have received special training in the care of older people.

Research suggests that specialist multi-disciplinary assessment and management can improve older care home residents' health and quality of life, reducing mortality and functional disability while simultaneously reducing costs. Such an approach has been advocated by the Department of Health, as outlined in the National Service Framework for Older People (2001). A number of specialist local initiatives have developed to address residents' unmet physical health needs. However, little is known about the organisation and delivery of these initiatives or how effective different models of service provision are in meeting those needs.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY The study has two main aims:

- To provide a baseline picture of existing services, identifying core features of national variation in their organisation, activities and responsibilities.
- To develop a categorisation of and systematically describe different models of service provision.

The study is intended to provide initial data for later in-depth evaluative work assessing the impact and cost-effectiveness of different models of service provision, which will provide an evidence base for service development and commissioning in this area.

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The Personal Social Services Research Unit undertakes social and health care research, focusing particularly on policy research and analysis of equity and efficiency in community care and long term care and related areas, including services for elderly people, people with mental health problems and children in care. The Unit's work is funded mainly by the Department of Health.

The PSSRU Bulletin and publication lists are available free of charge from the PSSRU librarian in Canterbury (01227 827773) and at www.PSSRU.ac.uk. The PSSRU was established at the University of Kent at Canterbury in 1974 and from 1996 has operated from three sites:

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DESIGN

The study is in four stages:

- A systematic literature review will identify examples of specialist healthcare initiatives and their key components. This work, alongside consultation with key stakeholders, will inform the subsequent stages.
- A national survey of Geriatricians and Primary Care Trust (PCT) Medical Directors will identify the range, type and content of existing services in England. Cost data will be collected to provide an estimate of the unit costs of each service.
- A categorisation of different models of service provision will be developed based on shared characteristics between services, and the prevalence of such models will be reported.
- Interviews with clinicians and other lead staff working within each of the identified models will be conducted to validate the developed typology. A sample of care homes will also be contacted to determine their perception of service availability.

OUTPUT

The study's findings will be communicated through the PSSRU's formal links with the Department of Health and disseminated via the PSSRU Bulletin and website. Findings will also be published in professional and peer-reviewed journals and presented at national conferences.

In addition, the study will be linked with a concurrent PSSRU research programme investigating the delivery of old age mental health services.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The staff conducting the study are David Challis, Paul Clarkson, Rebecca Hays, Sue Tucker and Angela Worden at the PSSRU, University of Manchester; Stuart Parker at the Sheffield Institute for Studies on Ageing, University of Sheffield; and Martin Vernon at the South Manchester University Hospitals NHS Trust.

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