

## Housing and Care: Care Homes and their Alternatives

Ann Netten, Robin Darton, Jacquetta Williams and Ann-Marie Towers

Over the years PSSRU has undertaken a wide variety of studies of care homes and their residents. Recently, there have been major shifts in this area of provision with an increased number of homes closing and new forms of housing and care being developed. This programme of work investigates the implications of these changes. We report on work that has been undertaken on home closures and exploratory work investigating key research questions on new developments in housing and care.

### Home closures

Currently, there is no national statutory guidance aimed specifically at managing the care home closure process and little is known about the way in which independent sector homes are closed. We found that local plans were patchy; about one-third of councils had no local guidelines, and where there were plans, arrangements differed (Williams and Netten, 2005).

### The home closure process

In order to explore what happens in practice, eight case studies were conducted in four authorities. In-depth interviews were conducted with 35 relatives, ten residents and 24 social services staff.

Notice periods varied considerably, ranging from one-month to over a year, and some residents experienced a second unplanned move soon afterwards. Some service users said there was no choice of a new home, due to a lack of information about vacancies and homes, insufficient number and range of homes with appropriate placements, time pressure, and delays in assessments. Some relatives reported feeling forced into accepting the additional upheaval of a temporary placement and experiencing different levels of help and involvement in the relocation process, across and within the closures studied. Relatives identified deteriorating standards of care and/or the physical environment during the closure of three of the homes. This was associated with the loss of existing home staff.

Care managers identified multiple constraints during a care home closure, some of which echoed those identified by service users. Other factors included internal systems, causing unnecessary delays, and restrictions on the advice they could offer about specific homes. They were concerned about how residents might be affected and some said the work was stressful. Some spent considerable time negotiating new placements. This could involve balancing the perspectives of residents, relatives, 'old' and 'new' homes, the finance department, the needs of other older people wanting a placement and their own priorities and concerns. Sometimes the aim of promoting service users' choice and finding the most suitable home were difficult to reconcile.

Recommendations made by relatives and residents and care managers are summarised in box 1. The research suggests that to maintain standards during closure periods and ensure the timely, efficient and safe relocation of residents, there is a need for:

- National guidance on local councils' responsibilities to promote fair access to support
- Greater clarity about the role of the regulator
- Policy guidance on how local councils might best resolve potential tensions

## Further information

Publications from the closures of care homes for older people work, including reports, journal articles and summaries, are available on the PSSRU website.

- between their aims and objectives
- Greater consistency in the provision of care management, and communication of good practice development
- Improved practitioner discourse on how care home residents can be supported to understand and deal with a care home closure, particularly those with communication difficulties and/or dementia
- Ring-fenced resources and/or levers to help maintain standards.

### Box 1 Recommendations for good practice

#### Relatives and residents and care managers:

- Owners should give at least two months notice
- Relatives should be kept informed (by care managers and home owners)
- There is a need for better vacancy information
- Someone known to residents should travel with them to their new home
- 'New homes' should be sensitive to the needs of residents who have experienced a closure

#### Relatives and residents:

Care home owners should:

- Talk to relatives when closure is a possibility
- Give the reasons for closure
- Notify councils promptly
- Maintain standards and keep residents' daily lives as normal as possible

#### Councils and care managers should:

- Provide more information about homes and what they offer
- Listen to residents' preferences and views about homes

#### Care managers:

- Advocacy and representation should be made available to ensure residents' needs and views are heard (during and after a closure)
- Care managers should work with homes collaboratively
- Small teams of care managers should be put in place quickly
- Moving residents quickly is preferable if staff begin to leave
- There needs to be greater flexibility in the timing and frequency of monitoring and follow-up after a closure

## Housing and care developments

There is considerable policy emphasis being put on developing new housing and care arrangements, collectively termed extra care housing (ECH). We reviewed information about levels of provision, academic and policy literatures, and consulted with service users and other stakeholders. Key issues we identified were:

- Lack of clear definitions and a lack of data about developing levels of provision of ECH.
- Lack of systematic evidence about the costs and benefits of ECH.
- Conflicting expectations about what the new arrangements were to deliver.
- Service users' need for information when making decisions about their future living arrangements.
- A need for information on the advantages and disadvantages of alternative staffing arrangements for ECH, and for information on staff supply, qualifications, training and reimbursement.
- A need for greater understanding of ECH in relation to general housing policies and international developments.

The primary output from these activities is our plan for future work (see page 8) through which we hope to explore these issues.

## Reference

Williams, J. and Netten, A. (2005) English local authority powers, responsibilities and guidelines for managing the care home closure process, *British Journal of Social Work*, 35, 6, 921–936.