

Further information

The report *The Effectiveness and Cost-Effectiveness of Support and Services to Informal Carers of Older People* may be viewed/downloaded from the Audit Commission website (www.audit-commission.gov.uk/olderpeople). The report is also available free of charge as a bound publication from the Audit Commission or from PSSRU (Kent/LSE). A second review by the same author, *Caring for Older People and Employment*, is available from the same sources.

Services for Carers of Older People: are they Effective?

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Since the community care reforms of the early 1990s, practical support for carers has become one of the key building blocks of community care policy in the UK.

In 2003, the PSSRU was commissioned by the Audit Commission to carry out a literature review of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of support and services to informal carers of older people (Pickard, 2004).

The review looks at a number of different types of support/services of potential benefit to carers, including daycare, breaks/respite in an institutional setting, in-home breaks/respite, carer support groups, social work/counselling, home care and multi-dimensional approaches. It focuses on recent studies of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of services in England and Wales and draws heavily on the PSSRU study by Davies and Fernández (2000). Studies carried out in other countries, and earlier studies in this country, are also summarised.

The effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of services is considered in relation to a number of specific outcomes, including outcomes for carers, such as reducing the negative psychological effects of caring, and outcomes for older people, such as delaying admissions to institutional care.

The conclusion is that, in the context of current community care policies and practice in England and Wales, four services are effective and/or cost-effective in terms of one or more of the outcomes examined. These are: daycare, home care, institutional respite care and social work/counselling (Pickard, 2004, p. 59). The review finds that there is insufficient evidence to evaluate the effectiveness of one service, in-home respite, and no evidence of effectiveness in relation to another service, carer support groups.

The review suggests that services aimed at the older person, like home care, may be more acceptable to both the older person and the carer than carer-specific services, like breaks/respite. For example, day care that is provided primarily to benefit the carer may not be what the older person wants, especially when this involves frequent attendances at a day centre. Equally, many older people do not want to go into an institution, even if this is just for a short stay.

The work finds, however, that although access to respite services for carers of older people increased during the 1990s, the same was not true of home care services. The home care service is still primarily directed at older people without carers. Drawing on the review and other sources, the Audit Commission concludes that 'Care managers find themselves gate-keeping very limited resources in the face of raised expectations from carers' and suggests that any new resources for carers should be focused on services that 'do not cost vast amounts of money' but are directed at a larger number of carers (Audit Commission, 2004, p. 41).

References

Audit Commission (2004) *Support for Carers of Older People. Independence and Well-being 5*, Audit Commission, London.
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Efficiencies and their Implications, Ashgate, Aldershot.
 Pickard L. (2004) *The Effectiveness and Cost-Effectiveness of Support and Services to Informal Carers of Older People*, Audit Commission, London.