

Programme News

Update from the Personal Social Services Research Unit at the University of Kent
January 2006

INSIDE...

This newsletter has information about some of our key activities in 2005:

- Surveys of Admissions to Care Homes and Home Care
- Older People's Perceptions of Control
- The Extra Care Housing Evaluation

BACKGROUND

Current government policy highlights the importance of providing housing, health and social care services that promote choice, quality and control for older people. The research we conduct is concerned with how different types of housing and care affect these important aspects of quality of life for older people.

As a Department of Health funded research unit, we are able to carry out long-term research in this area. One of the advantages of this sort of research is that it allows us to evaluate new initiatives over time. The work described in this edition of the Programme News concerns a broad range of housing and care options for older people:

- Care homes
- Home care
- Specialised housing and care (very sheltered or extra care housing)

SURVEYS OF ADMISSIONS TO CARE HOMES AND HOME CARE

In 2005 the PSSRU conducted two surveys for the Department of Health. The surveys were carried out in a sample of local authorities chosen to represent the different types of authorities in England. The purpose of the study was to update information about the need for older people's social services across the country. The fieldwork for the study was conducted by NOP World.

The survey of admissions to care homes was conducted in 16 local authorities. Social workers filled out anonymous questionnaires about older people being admitted to care homes with financial support from the local authority. The second survey involved face-to-face interviews with older people receiving home care services and this took place in 13 of the 16 areas. Altogether, information was collected about 820 people admitted to care homes and 375 people receiving home care services. All the people included in the results are over 65 years old.

Have people being admitted to care homes changed?

The PSSRU conducted a very similar survey in 1995. Compared with people moving into care homes in 1995, people in 2005 are:

- Older
- More frail
- More likely to be suffering with severe cognitive impairment

What are the characteristics of people receiving home care?

This was the first time that we surveyed people receiving home care services, so we cannot look at how these people have changed over time. However, compared with people moving into care homes in 2005, people receiving home care services are:

- Younger
- More able to care for themselves

During 2006 we will analyse the data from these surveys further to explore the differences between these groups in more detail.

OLDER PEOPLE'S PERCEPTIONS OF CONTROL

The promotion of choice and control for older people is a policy priority in the fields of housing, health and social services. This study aims to explore how services and service settings contribute to people's sense of control. We are interested in how feeling in control of one's life affects one's well-being. For example, are people more likely to report feeling satisfied with their life and the services they receive if they feel more in control?

How are we investigating this?

We are currently interviewing a sample of residents in care homes and very sheltered housing in two counties in England. We hope to interview about 100 people in each setting. All of the people taking part in the study are over the age of 65 and receive at least four hours of care a week. The interviews last about half an hour and ask people questions about the services they receive, their sense of control over their daily lives and the things that are important in making a place feel like home for them.

Consultations with Research Advisors

We would like to thank the Research Advisors living in two local Very Sheltered Schemes for their valuable input into the research material for the project. Following feedback from these groups, we made improvements to the wording of the information leaflet and also to the design of the show cards to assist the visually impaired. The residents and tenants taking part in the interviews have since made positive comments about the clarity of this material, illustrating the value of consulting advisors in the design stage of the study.

When will we know the results?

We will finish interviewing in January 2006. A report will be sent to the Department of Health by June 2006 and feedback will then be prepared for participating homes and schemes. We hope to be able to update you on the results of this research in our Summer Newsletter next year.

THE EXTRA CARE HOUSING EVALUATION

In our last Programme News we reported that the government is investing in extra care housing – self-contained housing that offers 24-hour care and support from social care and health teams. This funding will enable some

local authorities to build new schemes in their area.

The evaluation

The PSSRU is going to evaluate the effect of this type of accommodation on the health and quality of life of older people. We will be interviewing residents, relatives and staff from each scheme.

When we start designing the research materials for the evaluation we will consult local Research Advisors to ensure that project material benefits from their valuable experience and insight. It is important that the methods we use help and encourage people to take part in the research.

Extra Care Housing in Context

In our February 2005 Programme News we mentioned the need to find out how much extra care housing is currently available. To do this we have been conducting interviews with social services and housing departments in a sample of local authorities across the country. The interviews have not been completed, but there are some early results to report.

Most authorities have several schemes in operation and are making plans to open more. The interviews have highlighted the difficulties that authorities have to overcome when opening schemes – for example, recruiting staff, finding suitable sites for building, gaining planning permission and raising sufficient revenue. However, the study has shown that all schemes aim to provide a home for life and promote independent living.

The Housing and Care Research Programme team at the Personal Social Services Research Unit includes Ann Netten, Robin Darton, Ketta Williams, Ann-Marie Towers and Laura Dawson. Much of the research is funded by the Department of Health. Views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily those of the Department. We would welcome comments about this newsletter.

PSSRU, University of Kent, Canterbury, Kent, CT2 7NF. Tel. 01227 823963.