

CARE HOME RESIDENTS' AND RELATIVES' EXPECTATIONS AND EXPERIENCES

PSSRU

Outline of a research project funded by the Department of Health and the Registered Nursing Home Association

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BACKGROUND

This study will examine the differences between older people's expectations and experiences of living in a care home setting. Other recent work in the PSSRU has shown that people's experiences of living in a high quality care home environment can afford them the same level of well-being and sense of control that is experienced by residents of extra care housing. Despite the development of new forms of provision, such as extra care housing, care homes still provide the great majority of places, and are likely to continue to support people with intensive care needs. There is anecdotal evidence that although people dread moving into a care home, their experiences once there are very different. The Registered Nursing Home Association (RNHA) approached the PSSRU to examine the neglected area of residents' own views of living in care homes. The Department of Health also agreed to support the study, in particular to examine concerns about the possibility of abuse of residents in care homes.

The methodology for the study has been developed in collaboration with the British Market Research Bureau (BMRB).

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The study aims to:

- Compare the expectations and experiences of residents living in care homes for older people.
- Compare the expectations and experiences of relatives involved in choosing a care home for residents unable to take part in the study.
- Examine people's reasons for moving into or choosing care homes, and their perceptions and beliefs about them, and compare these with their experiences or their older relative's experiences of living in care homes for a period of three months.
- Compare the experiences of residents who moved into care homes with those of individuals who moved into extra care housing.
- Identify the characteristics of residents for whom care home provision is a positive choice.
- Provide evidence for the future development of the care home sector.

DESIGN

The study will involve two parallel surveys: an interview survey of new residents admitted to care homes for older people in England for long-term care over a period of approximately three months; and a telephone survey of relatives of residents judged to be unable to participate. The local authorities in England have been grouped into six regions (strata), and a local authority or group of local authorities has been selected within each stratum. The selected local authorities include areas with different levels of affluence, levels of urbanisation and rurality, and levels of minority ethnic population. A random sample of 150 care homes in each of the six local authorities/groups will be approached to participate in the study, using the list maintained by the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) as the sampling frame. Each sample of 150 homes is expected to yield an achieved sample of about 100 homes, but an additional sample will be selected if required. Separate samples of care homes providing personal care and nursing care will be selected to ensure that sufficient homes providing nursing care are included. Each survey has been designed to yield a minimum of 200 respondents, based on admission rates and estimated response rates.

The study will include homes in both the private and the voluntary sectors. Homes managed by local authorities and homes in London boroughs will not be included. The local authority sector is undergoing significant changes, and there are relatively few local authority homes, or homes in London. The inclusion of these homes would require the use of a disproportionate amount of the resources available.

METHOD

The recruitment of homes will follow the approach used in two similar BMRB studies. Homes that agree to participate will be asked to complete a short questionnaire covering basic information about the home. The homes will be asked to approach each new resident to ask them to take part, following a specified procedure to ensure that informed consent is obtained. When BMRB receives the name of a new resident, an appointment will be made to conduct a first interview within 2–3 weeks. At the interview, the resident will be asked to consent to a second interview three months later. The interviews will be conducted by experienced interviewers, using CAPI (computer-assisted personal interviewing), and will each take about 30 minutes. For residents judged to be unable to give informed consent or to be incapable of taking part in an interview, a similar two-stage telephone interview will be conducted among relatives involved in choosing the home.

The questionnaires will focus on the expectations and experiences of residents or their relatives, drawing on other recent PSSRU studies. The initial questionnaires will include background demographic information, information on care needs, reasons for moving into a care home and expectations about care homes. The second questionnaires will focus on residents' experiences of living in a care home, or relatives' experiences of the older person's life in a care home, and examine whether their expectations had been borne out by their experience to date.

Pilot studies will be conducted in care homes in a local authority not included in the main sample. The recruitment procedures will be discussed with care home staff and the questionnaires will be tested with samples of existing residents and relatives.

TIMETABLE

Recruitment of homes: January–February 2008
Interviewing: February–August 2008
Final dataset supplied to PSSRU: October 2008
Report: End 2008

OUTPUTS

A preliminary paper on the role of care homes is planned for Summer 2008. The results of the study will be presented in a report to the Department of Health and the RNHA, and in articles submitted to peer-reviewed publications. A summary of the results will be made publicly available on the PSSRU website, and further arrangements for the dissemination of the findings will be discussed with the funders of the study.

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