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Smaller Care Homes Get Better Reports

Social Care remains top of the agenda. In a recent Guardian report, Care and Quality Commission unannounced inspections of care homes found medicines being administered unsafely, alarm calls going unanswered and residents not getting help to eat or use the toilet. Some residents were found to have been woken up by night-shift care workers, washed and then put back to bed, apparently to make life easier for staff.

Andrea Sutcliffe, chief inspector of adult social care at the CQC, said such practice showed a fundamental lack of dignity and respect. She admitted disappointment that only one in 50 of all care services had managed to achieve the top rating of “outstanding”, and warned that social care was in a “precarious” state. According to Age UK the results leave elderly people and their families “playing Russian roulette” when choosing a nursing home or other care service.

One in three nursing homes has worryingly failed its official inspection in results described by the government’s care minister as “completely unacceptable”. The CQC said that of 4,000 nursing homes, 32% have been rated 'inadequate' or 'require improvement' and 37% have been told they must improve safety. While nursing homes come out worst, services grouped as 'community social care' emerge best. These include sheltered housing with “extra-care” support and so-called “shared lives” schemes whereby people accept others needing care and support into their own homes.

By region, the east of England has the best overall results and the north-west the worst. By size, small care homes and homecare services emerge far better than large ones – three times as many large care homes, with 50 or more beds, being judged inadequate or requiring improvement than small ones with up to 10.

Sutcliffe said that although some big homes had proved they could provide outstanding care, smaller homes were often better at the personal touch and at retaining experienced staff.

Nicola O’Brien, head of policy and campaigns at Alzheimer’s Society, said the inspection results suggested that things had got even worse for people with dementia since the CQC’s “tipping point” warning.

“Too often we hear the consequences of inadequate care – our investigation last year revealed people with dementia left in soiled sheets, or becoming ill after eating out-of-date food, and that only a third of homecare workers have received dementia training, leaving families fearing for their loved ones. Without adequate funding, it was no surprise that care providers were being forced to cut corners. We need to see government act before the care system collapses, with clear detail on consultation for reform that is backed up with action.” We in the NPC concur with this and go further – No further scrutiny needed – instead a tax-funded health and social care system that would minister to all who need it, and a stop to the £6 billion cuts since 2010 that are still ongoing.

A quote from Jackie Doyle-Price, the newly appointed minister for social care, does not fully address our concerns known by many for more than two decades now. She said: “While this report shows that the vast majority of people receive ‘good’ or ‘outstanding’ adult social care, it is completely unacceptable that standards in some settings are below those rightly expected by care users and their families.” So – what to do?

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