

Elderly face ‘Russian roulette’ of understaffed nursing homes

Chris Smyth, Health Editor

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Andrea Sutcliffe, chief inspector of social care: “It appears to be increasingly difficult for some providers to deliver the safe, high quality and compassionate care people deserve” CHRIS HARRIS FOR THE TIMES

One in three nursing homes is inadequate, condemning tens of thousands of elderly people to substandard care, an overview of inspections has found.

Elderly care is “precarious” with homes deteriorating as qualified staff leave over poor pay and conditions, inspectors say. Families face a “Russian roulette” with one in four social care services, including home care, not safe enough, campaigners warned.

Inspectors found residents going weeks without showers, falling repeatedly, missing medicines and being woken at dawn for the convenience of staff.

After inspecting all 24,000 social care services looking after a million people in the UK, the Care Quality Commission said the system risked tipping into disaster.

Andrea Sutcliffe, chief inspector of social care, said: “It appears to be increasingly difficult for some providers to deliver the safe, high quality and compassionate care people deserve. . . With demand for social care expected to rise over the next two decades, this is more worrying than ever.”

A fifth of all social care was rated as requiring improvement or inadequate overall, rising to a quarter on safety.

Problems were particularly severe in the 4,000 nursing homes that look after 221,000 of the most vulnerable people, with 32 per cent not good enough overall, rising to 37 per cent on safety.

Almost one in ten nursing posts is vacant, leaving many homes short-staffed or reliant on agency workers.

Gary Kirwan of the Royal College of Nursing said: “Since the government cut funding to local authorities, attracting and retaining social care staff has been extremely difficult. It is poorly paid and carers work under considerable pressure . . . The few remaining registered nurses are overstretched.”

Inspectors returned to 1,830 services and found a quarter of those ranked “good” had to be downgraded. Four of the eight ranked “outstanding” fell to “requires improvement”. “That shows the fragility in the sector — good quality care is precarious,” Ms Sutcliffe said.

Caroline Abrahams of Age UK said: “When significant numbers of previously effective providers are unable to sustain a quality care service you know the system’s in serious trouble.

“Older people are effectively playing Russian roulette when they need care.”

The CQC warned in the autumn that social care was approaching a tipping point and ministers have promised a £2 billion injection, but the fate of long-term reform remains unclear after they backed away from plans for a “dementia tax” during the election campaign.

BEHIND THE STORY

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Chris Smyth

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comments

Prettything

I think this demonstrates that inspection does not bring about improvement - a strap line frequently used by national inspectorates. What this type of inspection, with its four broad bands of judgement does offer is a snapshot of the state of play, but it's a pretty expensive way of doing things! Same with Ofsted.

What makes the biggest difference is the gatekeeping - only registering / licensing those who can do it, including a financial viability test, but also responding to local intelligence and taking early enforcement action where necessary - and I mean early - not letting it drag on for years as a home 'bumps along the bottom'.

Care providers have been inspected by a national body (which has changed three times in that period) for 16 years and in that time the situation has worsened. Care services don't need more inspection, they need more money, especially from local authorities who have screwed the rates down to below the cost of providing the care. That can sometimes be about not having sufficient cash, but not always. Local authorities make choices what they spend their money on. A Chief Executive once described it as 'more daffodils in the park, or more home helps?' Some local authorities do not like the thought of a care provider making a profit. Not many (except the big chains) do - and some are forced to pay low wages and cut corners in order to make a

living. Those paying the full fees are forced to subsidise local authority rates - often without their knowledge, unless they join something like the Care Co-Operative.

Richard Coundley

The government potentially has lots money for social care but as a society we prioritise benefits for the working well above expenditure to look after the elderly and the sick! The promise of more benefits for the working well is a vote winner.

Stephen Williams

With eight of your friends buy a cul-de-sac of ten bungalows....
.....employ a carer to live in the tenth!

.

.....'Now where did I put that good idea?'

sarica

@Stephen It had crossed my mind if something like that was feasible, sounds good

Anthony Groom

'Russian roulette' care homes not up to standard.

You pay a fortune and many homes so poor. Apparently the best test is the 'sniff' one. If it smells bad then it probably is. Shameful .
Our old folk deserve better.

JoaoMendes

My wife has just resigned from her job as a care assistant at a care home because of low pay, permanent nights, no full weekend off, had to book all holiday a year in advance and quite frankly the man management skills of the organisation were about as efficient as a thrown brick. What I found interesting was that the

day shift were all UK born and white the night shift were foreign workers as is my wife.

Hattie Powis 9 hours ago

Who'd be old and infirm in 21st century Britain?

Mark Jones

@Hattie Powis All of us apparently - sooner or later!!