Staying on my feet

Falls Prevention: Best Practice Guide for Care Homes in Wales
My Home Life is a collaborative initiative that promotes quality of life and delivers positive change in care homes for older people. We work with care homes, statutory bodies, community organisations and others to co-create new ways of working to better meet the needs of older people, their relatives and staff. Our vision is a world where care homes are great places to live, die, visit and work; where care homes are:

• Supported to deliver to their potential
• Valued and trusted by those who work with them
• Cherished by their local communities

It has been an enormous privilege for me, through my role within My Home Life, to have met and worked alongside some extraordinary care home managers and care assistants who, despite all the challenges that they face, give their love and commitment - day in and day out - to supporting the quality of life of those that they are caring for.

This best practice guide explores what works well in supporting residents to remain mobile and to reduce their risk of falling. Contrary to the negative messages about care homes that we hear or read in the press, what is reported here offers a profoundly different picture. It shows that many care homes are quietly and purposefully leading the way in developing creative individual strategies to help make a difference to each of their residents.

The examples gathered demonstrate the complexity of the work and the skills that care home practitioners have to see beyond each resident’s frailty, reflecting upon what makes each person ‘tick.’ It explores how they can support residents to navigate safely around the home; how they can help residents feel motivated to get out of their chair and engage in physical activity or to drink or eat properly. Staff are having to consider how they help get the balance between reducing the risks of falling with the rights of these individuals to make choices.

Overall, the examples of practice in this guide demonstrate the potential of care homes to really make a huge difference to our frailest citizens. If, as a society, we can all do just a little bit more to value the vital role that care homes are playing, to appreciate our staff and perhaps offer a helping hand, then we can make the good things that happen in care homes happen a bit more often.

We hope you enjoy reading this best practice guide and please do join our movement:
www.myhomelife.org.uk

Foreword by Tom Owen, Director of My Home Life UK
How might we find out what works well in terms of falls prevention in care homes? It is clear that considerable work has already been done in Wales to look at how to prevent falls, but there has been little consultation with care homes who are the experts in supporting older people.

My Home Life Cymru has been working on a project called ‘Raising Awareness of Falls Prevention in care homes’ funded by Welsh Government. We produced a bulletin in April 2018 to open the dialogue and invite care home managers and staff to one of four networking days with the intention of coproducing a best practice guide written by care homes for care homes in Wales.

The networking events were attended by 52 care home staff from 23 care homes all willing to share their expertise and stories of best practice from their homes. We asked them about their experiences and what they do to support residents to stay active, in ways that are right for them.

This best practice guide is written with the voices of the care homes throughout. We hope it will give you some top tips, some food for thought and the confidence to keep up all your good work!

You will also find some useful links to other resources at the end of this guide.
We asked care homes…
What is most likely to cause a resident to fall?

Likely causes of falls in care homes include:

- A change in prescribed medication
- Dehydration
- Infections (UTI)
- Changes in visual perception
- Lack of information about a resident’s history of falling
- Lack of movement (not wanting to move)
- Persistent walking
- Poor fitting shoes/slippers
- Lack of time for meaningful activity
- Over protective families
- Lack of specialised assessment and equipment
- Altercations between residents – pushing and shoving
- Lack of training for care staff to build confidence in their abilities

Watching for the presence of these factors is part of the approach to preventing falls in care homes. You might ask yourself questions like these:

How the care home environment is facilitating opportunities for people to move?

Is the equipment and training right?

Do care home staff know the right information about people’s unique circumstances and needs?

How are family members involved?

Do staff need training and if so, what should the training be about?

The answers to these questions will be different in different care homes, but finding time and space to ask the questions is what is important.
What is working well for care homes and what might help to reduce the number of falls?

**Encouraging hydration and good nutrition**

“We have cocktail parties, alcoholic and non-alcoholic cocktails every day! We offer lollies, jellies, milkshakes and fruit, anything to encourage hydration.”

“We eat and drink with our residents, it’s more social. We chat and eat, like a normal family.”

“Recognising that residents need to eat at different times of the day. One of our residents is constantly on the go so we encourage her to eat more because she uses up so much energy. This might mean walking with her and offering her a biscuit.”

“We have one resident who wakes much earlier than everyone else. Sometimes she will have two breakfasts, one with the night staff and one later with the other residents.”
Residents are coming to us much later in their lives now and sometimes at the end of their lives. We can’t always do activities like we used to, it’s about adapting ourselves to the changing needs of residents.”

“The language we use to describe residents has an impact on how we treat them. We avoid using words like ‘faller’ ‘double-handler’ and ‘feeder’ We focus on what a resident can do!”

“Knowing our residents is what really helps. We have one resident who walks around the home all day, we don’t stop her from walking and we are always there to assist when she falls from exhaustion”

“Being mindful of the changing visual perceptions of our residents really helps. We have a resident with dementia who struggles to walk from one room to the other because of the change in carpet colour. Being aware of this helps us to support her to feel safe.”

The care home staff involved in this best practice guide repeatedly made the point that falls prevention is a team effort. Think about who is on your team and how they can all be involved.

“In staff handovers, we make sure we pass on what we have noticed so the next shift can continue to keep an eye on things. This isn’t just the clinical stuff, it’s the little observations you make when you know your residents.”

“As a manager, I need to be consistent with my messages to staff. As a team, we know we can reduce falls even if we can’t prevent them. We don’t blame staff for falls, we work together to reduce them!”

“We have to all sing from the same hymn sheet, it’s no good one shift doing one thing and another doing something else. We all agree to take positive risks rather than restricting movement and activity.”

“It’s the little observations you make when you know your residents.”

“We take a whole team approach to falls prevention, it’s not just something the manager and senior staff need to know about, it’s the residents, relatives, kitchen staff, handyman, everyone really!”
Our care homes, equipment and the environment

There is much that can be done to modify the care home environment and some examples are given below. It can be useful to have in place your own ‘detective work’ that will help you know the patterns within the home and give you clues about where change can be made. It could be changes to the carpets, or having designated stops for people to rest, or thinking creatively about what will encourage people to go for a walk.

“We have one resident who will not use a walking frame but will walk unaided if she is pushing a dolls pram. She has a sense of purpose and is mobile and happy.”

“We often have two members of staff helping a resident to walk especially if they have just returned from hospital. One member of staff will hold the resident’s arm, the other to walk slowly behind with a wheelchair in case the resident needs to sit down.”

“Audits do help. They help us to see if there is a pattern when a resident has a fall, what time of day does it tend to happen, is the fall related to an infection or change of medication? It’s all part of the detective work!”

“We have pressure pads that can been fitted under the carpet for someone who frequently gets up during the night. This is so we can be available to support them if they need an arm to hold.”

“We have ‘resting stations’ around the home a chair or two in the corridor so a resident can stop and have a little rest. Some residents will say I can’t walk that far (the length of a corridor) so we have pit stops set up for more achievable goals.”
The care homes that we met shared some lovely examples of activities that keep residents’ mobile, active and provide a sense of purpose.

- Going out for a coffee to a local café
- Gardening
- Going to the pub – examples of pubs inside and outside the care home
- Joining a community singing group
- Going to the beach or bring items of reminiscence from the beach.
- Going into a themed room/space in the home
- Joining a public library/leisure centre so residents can join classes
- Inviting schools in to sing and going out to schools to read to the children
- Nursery children visiting the home
Music was mentioned often by the care homes who spoke about the impact it has on both staff and residents.

“We send updates to families via email or WhatsApp with photos - trips for ice cream, McDonalds, in-house activities and day to day life. We also use SKYPE to contact a family in Spain weekly.”

“Our relative’s meetings are good for sharing information about the home but the real communication comes in the times you bump into a relative in the corridor, or at a social event. We must always make time for these moments.”

Animals

We heard about making bird feeders, caring for chicks, feeding guinea pigs and chickens all attracting the interest of residents, relatives and staff.

“Our hairdresser’s husband brings in their puppy, he is like a ball of fluff! It’s lovely to watch a resident stroke his fur. The smallest thing for us but significant for a resident who has little movement.”

Music

Music was mentioned often by the care homes who spoke about the impact it has on both staff and residents.

“Dancing is a great way to get people moving, exercise classes are good but sometimes it’s the impromptu dancing that gets everyone up!”

“Using iPads we like to search for the music that our residents like. For those residents that might not be able to use verbal communication we watch to see if their toes are tapping.’

“Musical entertainers often bring musical instruments for the residents to try. It’s lovely to see everyone involved and moving to the music.”

Everyday tasks

It is also the everyday tasks that encourage activity.

“I often ask residents, please could you help me with the sweeping/dusting/laying the tables today?”

“We have areas in the home where residents can make themselves a cup of tea or coffee.”

Family and friends

Keeping in touch with friends and family and staying connected.

“We send updates to families via email or WhatsApp with photos - trips for ice cream, McDonalds, in-house activities and day to day life. We also use SKYPE to contact a family in Spain weekly.”

“Our relative’s meetings are good for sharing information about the home but the real communication comes in the times you bump into a relative in the corridor, or at a social event. We must always make time for these moments.”
Who might help care homes to achieve the best for their residents, relatives and staff?

The care homes we spoke to at the networking events raised some points about working with other professionals. They came up with some ideas of how we might work better together.

One point of contact
• Having one point of contact when a resident is admitted to hospital

“It can be difficult to get through to the hospital and speak with someone who is caring for the resident”

Working together
• Shared training – working with hospital staff to share knowledge and experience
• Joint forum meetings for care homes and hospital staff
• Greater appreciation of the roles care home staff and hospital staff play

“We would have a better understanding of the pressures and constraints of hospital staff if we met with them and looked for ways to work together better.”
Opportunities
• More opportunities for care homes to get together

“We need time to meet, learn from each other and share the resources we have. We could share social events too!”

Sharing success
• Inviting hospital staff to our care homes
• Sharing success stories with the wider public

“The best stories are when we all work together to support someone to stay in their home if that is what they want”

Communication
• Good communication when planning discharge from hospital and some follow-up

“It would be really helpful if the hospital physiotherapist would show us some of the exercises they have been doing so we can keep up the good work on discharge”

Saving time
• Using tech to connect with health professionals, SKYPE or FaceTime for example
• Working with each other not against each other

“We have a great relationship with our district nurse, she will call ahead of her visit so we can get things ready, this saves her time.”

Listening more
• Listening to each other sharing medical knowledge with knowledge of the person

“I wish hospital staff would listen to us more, we know our residents and could really help them to know the individual.”

Sharing information
• A willingness to share information on the residents we care for everyday

“Hospitals won’t share information with us freely, and that can be very frustrating”

“We have a named GP who visits the home fortnightly, he is great. He knows our residents and listens to any concerns we may have.”
What makes you feel proud?

“I feel so proud when a resident sees me and says: ‘What are we doing today?’ They associate me with activity, outings and fun!”

“When I see staff not giving up on people, seeing them as they have always been and supporting them to stay active.”

“When I see staff stop to hold someone’s hand no matter how busy they are.”

“Seeing residents active and smiling!”

“When I see staff taking a resident’s arm not just reaching for a wheelchair.”

“When we work with other professionals to keep someone at home rather than taking them to hospital.”

“When relatives say thank you and when my manager says thank you!”

“When our skills are recognised and celebrated by other professionals.”

My home life Cymru

www.myhomelife.org.uk
Getting started

It is clear that many care homes in Wales are working creatively and with great care to support falls prevention. From the experiences and expertise of care home staff we have identified a Care Home Falls Prevention Wheel of 8 key areas that together can support best practice.

Think about what you can do in your care home to take the next steps to support people stay active and stay on their feet.

Falls Prevention Wheel
Useful links

Aging Well in Wales
Steady On... Stay SAFE is a national public awareness campaign from the National Taskforce for Falls Prevention and can be used in team meetings/training. You can access more information and a whole host of resources including simple exercises to support your residents to stay on their feet here:
www.ageingwellinwales.com/steadyon

Falls Prevention Fuel Tank
Produced by Cardiff & Vale UHB, and endorsed by National Falls Prevention Taskforce
English: https://youtu.be/KW49BJ8xmr8
Welsh: https://youtu.be/0ZXuYKqdWCQ

Welsh Ambulance
ISTumble
A Toolkit developed for use in care homes when someone has had a fall. It provides a checklist to help decide if it is necessary to call 999.

Dewis Cymru is the place for information about well-being in Wales. It has information that can help you think about what matters to you, along with information about local organisations and services that can help!
www.dewis.wales
Residents focusing on relationships developing best practice together

Focusing on relationships

Being appreciative

Having caring conversations

Wider health and social community

Local community

Relatives

Staff

www.myhomelife.org.uk
Acknowledgments

A very special thank you to Hengoed Park (Swansea) Ty Eirin (Porth) and St. David’s care home (Rhyl) for kindly hosting our networking events.

To the care home managers and staff from:
Three Cliffs, April Court, Sketty House, Langton Hall, Woodland Lodge, Llys-y-Seren, Cefn Lodge, Y Bwthyn, Ocean Living, Hengoed Park, Hengoed Court, Danygraig House, The Beeches, Meadowlands, Anwencare, Foxtroy House, Greenhill Manor, Ty Eirin, Glanenig, Preswylfa, Llys Elian, Bethshan, Beachview and St. Davids care home who took time out of their very busy days to share their expertise and bring the voices of care homes into this guide.

Thank you to Jon Dafydd-Kidd, from cARTrefu and Angharad Phillips, Health Initiatives Officer at Age Cymru for their support of this work.

To Welsh Government for funding this work.

Suzy Webster
My Home Life Cymru Coordinator
Suzanne.webster@swansea.ac.uk
@myhomelifecymru