

Managing the transition into a care home

Good practice guide no. 4



My Home Life Cymru

My Home Life aims to promote quality of life for those who are living, dying, visiting or working in care homes for older people through relationship-centred practice.

My Home Life Cymru celebrates and shares existing best practice in care homes and promotes care homes as a positive option for older people. This is one of a series of eight good practice guides that follow the evidence-based My Home Life themes.

There are eight evidence-based themes for My Home Life:

- Maintaining identity
- Sharing decision making
- Creating community
- **Managing transitions**
- Improving health and healthcare
- Supporting good end of life
- Promoting a positive culture
- Keeping workforce fit for purpose

These themes provide a framework that care homes can use to develop their services and help staff focus on quality of life issues rather than being led by the care tasks that are needed to care for the residents.



Good practice guides

This guide will hopefully inspire discussion about how to make the move into a care home as smooth as possible for the new resident and also their family and those providing care and support to them.

In particular we would like you to ask yourself:

How can you help residents cope with the transition of moving into a care home?

What can you do to make residents feel welcome, cared-for and valued?

As care home staff, your skills and expertise in engaging with and supporting residents can make all the difference. This guide includes some ideas, tips and practice examples to help all those involved to be aware of the issues that exist around transition.



'I didn't know what to expect'



For those people living in the wider community, care homes are for the most part an unknown entity. Unless an individual has cause to visit a home as a relative or friend of a resident or as a working professional, their view of care homes is coloured mostly by the often negative image portrayed by the media.

In most instances, the media carries stories relating to care homes that highlight instances of poor practice and/or abuse. Unfortunately, these examples occur frequently and the media are correct in bringing them to light. However, there are numerous examples and stories of excellent practice and quality of care in residential homes that usually don't get the attention of the public. This means that when an individual comes to move into a care home, they and their family can be very anxious and distressed.

- ***'What is it going to be like?'***
- ***'What am I allowed to bring with me?'***
- ***'Can I visit mum when I like?'***
- ***'What about my cat?'***
- ***'I'm on a special diet; will they be able to cater for my needs?'***
- ***'What if I don't like the people there?'***

New residents and their families need a great deal of support and time to help them to come to terms with their new situation and allay many of the fears they may have. Are you able to arrange for the prospective resident to visit and stay for a few days or a week in preparation for their move? Why not invite the family to come for lunch and meet with the staff, other residents and their families.

Open and regular communication is key when it comes to making a new resident and their family come to terms with their new situation and surroundings. A regular care home newsletter is a good way of keeping families informed about what is going on in the home.

Managing the move

The reasons for an older person to move into a care home can be many and varied. Some of these are:

- Increased frailty and dependency
- Poor physical or mental health, a fall, stroke or other sudden change in health
- Change in personal circumstances e.g. carers no longer able to cope at home
- Death of a spouse/partner



Within 24 hours, Mrs Williams' husband had died; she had a stroke and was moved into a care home.

This example may sound extreme, but many individuals move into a care home amid very upsetting and stressful circumstances. Moving into the home is a huge change for both the new resident and their family. Feelings and emotions will be running high during the first few days and weeks and people may be tearful, angry, and have feelings of guilt. Both the new resident and their family needs to feel in control and listened to.

Sian Gardner, the Manager of Severn View Residential Home in Chepstow commented, 'When we admit a new resident, we admit the whole family. If the resident isn't happy, then the family aren't going to be either and vice versa. There's a real need to give ongoing support to the new resident and their family during the initial period. They need to talk and we need to listen.'



Settling in

Moving home can be a stressful event for all of us, but even more so for a new resident of a care home. Their move can come amid upsetting circumstances and the thought of staying in the home is not a pleasant one for many.

What can help in making the new resident settle in their surroundings?

- Information about their new home, written in a way that is welcoming
- Meeting the new neighbours. Encourage other residents to go up and introduce themselves
- A warm smile and friendly disposition
- The new resident and their family need to be able to ask questions and talk over their new situation. Be ready to have a listening ear and to be aware of emotions running high
- Encourage family and friends to visit their loved one
- Encourage the new resident to take an active part in the life of the home e.g. ask to help out, engage in activities
- Introduce the new resident and their family to all the members of staff in the home.

A resident from Gwern Alyn Residential Home in Wrexham explained how he felt about moving into the home.

'I really didn't want to be here. I wanted to go home, but I wasn't able to. I was angry and frustrated and didn't want to mix with anyone. But the staff here have been great; they always have time to have a little chat and always have a smile. For me, it wasn't until I finally accepted my situation that I started to settle in. I realised that I couldn't go home, that I needed to be here and get the care. Once I accepted that, I settled down well.'

Top Tips to support practice in managing transitions

- Moving from one's own home into a care home is a major life transition for older individuals, particularly if it is unplanned, but with appropriate planning and support from care staff, good quality of life can ultimately be achieved by both residents and relatives.
- Think creatively about how to best provide potential residents and families with information so that they have a real sense of what to expect from the home and the role that they can play.
- Although it is not always possible to arrange one, a good way for a prospective resident to make an informed choice of a home is the 'try it and see' approach, whereby they visit different ones, staying for a period of a few hours or even a few days.
- When the prospective new resident comes to visit, could a resident(s) take the lead in giving them a tour of the home?
- Moving is likely to be traumatic. People need to feel that they have sufficient time to consider the move without undue pressure being placed on them. Care staff can help by encouraging them to take their time.
- It is crucial that wherever possible the resident feels in control of the decision to move to a care home. Engaging the services of advocates or friends to support the resident through the process can be helpful.
- Residents and relatives need to feel a part of the community of the home. They need to understand the layout and routines of the home, their room, what is available to them and who to go to for help.
- Many relatives want to continue to play a role in looking after their loved one, and should be encouraged to do so. Find ways to help them feel they are a valued part of the team in the care home.
- Relatives and residents need to feel that others are aware of the impact of the move on them and their loved ones. Assigning a particular staff member to a resident and family can help. Care staff in such a role should try to understand carers' and residents' feelings and the reasons why they might seem angry and suspicious. This way, care staff will gain trust.
- Where possible, other residents can help to support the new resident and the key staff member(s), offering friendship and understanding.
- Moving to a care home should not be the end of life outside of the home. The new resident should be encouraged and assisted to maintain relationships with family, friends and other individuals who may be able to help them through the transition.



How well are you doing? Rating your practice:

Let's stop and think about what you do as part of your role in the care home. Here are some things to think about.

Put yourself in the position of a resident going into a home. It is a stressful, even traumatic, experience to leave your own home, perhaps after many years, possibly experiencing health problems, and maybe in great distress if the move follows the death of your partner.

- What information might you want before choosing a home?
- What would your main fears about going into a care home be? What might help alleviate these fears?
- What kind of support might you need to come to terms with the loss of your home, your health, your loved one?
- What practical help would you need to move into a care home?
- What possessions would you hope to bring with you to the home?

- What can the home do to make you feel welcome, cared-for and valued?
- How can you be helped to remain linked to the past, to old friends, hobbies and places?
- What things in life are most important to you? How can these things remain with you in a care home?
- What will help you feel positive about the future?

Exploring the experience of the move with your residents can be therapeutic and can help you think through your day-to-day practice.

How does your practice rate?

Sometimes there are no easy answers to these questions. So much depends on individual circumstances. Try asking your colleagues what they think and share what you find.

Please visit agecymru.org.uk/mhlc to view other resources to help in developing the eight My Home Life best practice themes. Presentations from previous My Home Life Cymru events are also available to download.

In addition to this, the other My Home Life web sites – myhomelifemovement.org and myhomelifedvd.org.uk give detailed information on the work of My Home Life and are full of case studies and examples of good practice in action.

If you would like to support our vital work and make a difference to the lives of older people in Wales please contact the fundraising team at Age Cymru on 029 2043 1555 or donate at www.agecymru.org.uk/donate



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