

Improving health and healthcare

Good practice guide no.5



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 cope with the increasing demands of a care home population who need support with many varied and complex needs.

In particular we would like you to ask yourself:

How to maintain good quality of life despite increasing frailty?

How can we make sure that health and social care professionals work well together?

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 in the care and support of residents.



Health promotion within the home

The development and maintaining of good relationships with health professionals outside of the home is vital in securing good healthcare support for the residents. The area of health and healthcare however is not limited to traditional health services. The physical and mental well being of the residents can be maintained and possibly improved by being aware of the abilities and limitations of the residents. Can you look for opportunities to keep the person physically and mentally active?

- **Making a drink for themselves and visitors**
- **Folding their clothing and putting it away**
- **Household duties such as dusting and vacuuming**
- **Washing up**
- **Hanging out washing**
- **Helping to plan events and activities within the home**
- **Help to plan menus and offer recipes for the kitchen.**



Are you doing your best to promote healthy living within the home? How can you help residents, relatives/visitors and staff members to achieve and maintain as healthy a lifestyle as possible?

- **Provide exercise activities for residents, even those with limited mobility, for example Low Impact Functional Training (LIFT), as provided by Age Cymru**
- **Encourage relatives and visitors to take part in physical activity if they'd like to**
- **Encourage mental as well as physical stimulation e.g. reading, crossword puzzles, quizzes, group discussions**
- **Dancing is a great form of exercise as well as being very enjoyable. Many older residents will be able to teach younger staff members a few moves!**

Of course, not every resident will be physically or mentally able to take part in these activities. Also, you must carefully assess the risk of activities and also assess the risk to their independence.

Physical activity is beneficial in many ways, and has psychological benefits too. However, residents need to make use of everyday situations as mentioned above.

The climate and atmosphere of a care home should be one of support and enablement and not that of 'doing to' residents.

The longer you can support residents to keep the independence they have, the better. Keep in mind these points:

- Is the resident still able to take part in an activity (e.g. making a bed) to any degree, safely? This may only mean handing a pillow case to the worker who is doing most of the work. Or it could be that the person is able to contribute more to the task.
- A resident is more likely to fall if they are on their feet only occasionally. Rather than having everything within arm's reach, can you encourage them to move around when possible? For example, fetching a cardigan, book or glasses; these everyday items may be essential at various times during the day. If it is safe to do so, can you encourage the residents to get these things themselves, even if this means that the task of doing it takes longer?

There are many occasions when a resident has a healthcare background. Many doctors, nurses, surgeons, consultants, health visitors, midwives and the like now live in care homes.

Do you recognise their knowledge and expertise? Health practice may have seen many changes over the years, but these residents have a lot to offer in terms of experience. Can you look for opportunities to appropriately discuss health practices with residents? Whilst keeping confidentiality paramount, can we discuss general issues with them, listen to their stories and learn from their experience?



'The days of providing a little bit of care for older people who are mobile, are mostly gone.'

The profile of residents of care homes has changed dramatically over the years. When a new resident moves into the home, it is not uncommon for them to have multiple and complex needs. Many residents are unable to access the local community and its services and therefore rely the staff in the home to cater and care for their needs.



The changes that we have seen have meant that members of staff now need a high level of expertise and knowledge of health related issues. Also, there is an increased need to work closely with colleagues from the health professions. Many residents are now being provided with care in the home that would have been previously provided in continuing care units, hospices or local cottage hospitals.

Top Tips on improving health and healthcare

- Residents in care homes have highly complex health needs. Over seventy-five per cent of care home residents are classified as being severely disabled.
- Care homes sometimes struggle to access primary and specialist support for their residents. Care staff need to work with the residents' GPs and community nursing services to obtain the best healthcare services to support their residents' quality of life.
- Three-quarters of older people living in care homes have dementia and 40 per cent have depression. Many residents struggle to cope with the trauma of moving into a care home. Staff may need expert advice to support these residents. Professional counselling may also be required.
- Many residents moving into care homes have conditions that can be improved. Access to physiotherapy, speech and occupational therapy is essential for reducing dependency and promoting general health.
- Pain can impair movement, sleep, appetite, bowel and bladder functioning and socialising, yet older people often do not receive adequate pain treatment. Working with local professionals will provide you with the tools to improve pain management for the residents.
- Poor nutrition is reportedly widespread in care homes. It can lead to infection, poor wound-healing, pressure sores, depression and confusion. Small changes to make mealtimes a positive social experience can help. Make food appetising, interesting, healthy, easy to eat, tasty, what residents want/enjoy.
- About three-quarters of care home residents are incontinent, which can severely affect quality of life. Regular reviews with the local continence services to identify support and staff training needs can reap benefits.



- Many homes now provide balance and strength exercises for residents, to help maintain muscle strength and mobility, even in advanced age. Monitoring medication, good nutrition, removing environmental obstacles and appropriate use of walking aids can make a great difference to a resident's overall health and wellbeing.
- Care home staff need to talk to health professionals about how they can best support residents. Support from GPs and Community nurses can help to identify older people at risk, review the care that older people receive and additional services needed, as well as avoiding unnecessary hospital admissions.
- Care staff need to recognise and develop the skills that they have already developed in supporting very frail older people. Your expertise should be valued and could potentially be a resource to the wider health system – for instance, in offering advice on dementia care to hospital staff.

How well are you doing? Rating your practice:

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

- Find out what health support your residents need and are entitled to.
- Develop a directory of local health contacts.
- Get to know individuals in your local health teams.
- Explore how you and the healthcare team can work better together.
- Look at ways of sharing training and education or working on projects together.
- How are your residents supported to make decisions about their own healthcare?
- How do you assess whether you are adequately meeting the healthcare needs of residents?

- Do residents approach you with personal worries and concerns about their health or mental wellbeing? If so, how do you respond?
- What skills or expertise should you be developing to meet the health needs of your residents?
- How well do you work with your local GP, nurse and specialist health services in meeting the needs of your residents? This may include: oral healthcare, eye care, falls prevention, screening services and the local expert patient programme.

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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