

Keeping the workforce fit for purpose

Good practice guide no.8



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 sure that members of staff are receiving the right training and support in order to fulfil their roles.

In particular we would like you to ask yourself:

Have your staff had sufficient training to support the residents the best they can?

Do your staff have sufficient personal skills, empathy and understanding to engage positively with residents?

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 identify where you need to develop your service to make sure that all members of staff are supported and trained sufficiently.



Why do staff choose to work in a care home?



What is it that makes the difference to a resident of a care home? In discussions with residents and their families about their experiences with care homes, they were asked, 'What is it about this home that makes it a good place to live?' The response from over fifty individuals from twenty two homes included the following:

- ***'It's the people; it's the way they are with you.'***
- ***'It's the approach of the staff that makes the difference.'***
- ***'It's like the old song, "it ain't what you do; it's the way that you do it." That's what makes the difference.'***

The responses clearly indicate that it's people that make the difference to a resident's experience of living in a care home. The experience of the family and visitors also depends to a great extent on how they are treated and supported by staff, yet achieving this level of satisfaction for residents and their families does not come easily. Working in a care home can be a real challenge. Why is it then that people choose to work there? And when they get to work, what really is their job all about?

When asked to describe what their job was all about, replies from members of staff included the following:

- ***'We look after people.'***
- ***'We see to people's needs.'***
- ***'We make sure that they're ok.'***
- ***'We get people up, we dress them, see to their personal care, help with medication, feed them, take them to the toilet, then we do it all over again.'***

In all of these replies, it is obvious that staff were focusing on tasks rather than people. Whilst the residents of care homes do need care and a great deal of practical support in their lives, their whole life doesn't and shouldn't revolve around just these things.



Rather than just looking after and caring for residents, you and your staff need to be 'supporting them to enjoy the best quality of life they can,' (Sian Gardner, Manager, Severn View Residential Home, Chepstow). This should be enjoyed by all residents despite poor health (physical and mental), increased dependency and frailty.

How can you make this your focus? How do you stop being 'task lead' in your roles, and focus on the people you are supporting?

The role of training cannot be underestimated. When staff have been well trained for the roles that they fill, they can have great confidence in what they do. In identifying training opportunities for your staff, do you look to the residents for suggestions?

- What training do the residents think the staff should have?
- Could some residents have some input to the planning, design and delivery of training? E.g. Residents who have had a stroke, being involved in stroke awareness training.

That takes care of 'what you do', but what about 'the way that you do it'? Can we encourage members of staff to cultivate such qualities as?

- Patience
- Understanding
- Consideration
- Compassion
- Kindness
- Empathy



Think about how you can encourage staff to develop and cultivate these qualities. Make their experience in the home personal to them.

- How can I make a difference to this resident's life?
- Is the support I give good enough so that I would be happy for a loved one of mine to receive it?



Are you encouraging staff to think about 'the way that they do it'? Rather than concentrating on finishing your list of tasks for a particular resident, then moving on to the next, do staff stop to think, 'do I do what I do in a way that is beneficial to the resident?'

Sue Mason the manager of Pencoed Residential Home in Saundersfoot, decided to get the members of staff to try something new. "We don't often talk about feelings when it comes to discussing our jobs in the home. I asked each member of staff to ask themselves a question at the end of every shift. 'Through my interaction with the residents today, how did I make them feel?'"

The way that staff treat and interact with residents helps to form strong relationships throughout the home. Encouraging staff members to be thoughtful, kind, empathetic, considerate and caring in their approach is vital.

Top Tips on how to keep the workforce fit for purpose

- Help staff take the initiative and ownership of their roles. Too often staff are instructed on what to do, rather than supported to come to their own conclusions in resolving practice issues. The latter is a great way to help staff develop and ultimately give them a feeling of ownership and responsibility over their work. Staff meetings and individual supervision can be useful catalysts for supporting this reflection and thinking, and as such should be valued activities that are adhered to and not “skipped” by other priorities.
- Is the environment for training the best one for the staff? A classroom setup can be unsettling for some as they compare it to school, which may not have been a pleasant experience. Can you encourage staff members to support each other with tips that can help support residents more appropriately?
- Role model/walk the talk. Model what you expect from staff. Staff look up to managers to communicate the ethos and culture; if you are task-focused, the staff will be too; if you struggle to find time to listen to staff, staff will be the same with residents – get out of the office as often as you can to lead and inspire by example.
- Develop your communication skills: Managers need to inspire, enthuse and communicate accurately what they want their staff to do, there are many communication tools that can be hugely valuable in working to support staff. Staff meetings, newsletters, supervision and informal discussions are useful and should be planned in as regular tools for good communication and development.
- Training: consider the interpersonal and communication skills that staff may need to support residents to maintain identity, share decision-making and create communities. Find suitable training courses/mentoring or other training opportunities for staff to support them in addressing these key elements of residents’ experiences within the home.
- Training: consider and respond to the training needs of staff in terms of their ability to meet the changing clinical, physical, emotional needs of your residents (end of life, health, transitions).
- Support and value staff - staff need to feel that managers are approachable and available to discuss problems and feelings and that they will be really listened to, rather than palmed off. Staff who feel unvalued will not provide a positive service to your residents.
- Recognise the natural leaders that already exist throughout the organisation and support them to flourish.



- Emphasise the positive: care home staff often only expect to hear about the problems and where they are doing things wrong. Focus their attention on what is working well in the care home and using this as a starting point to taking forward change.
- Recognise the potential of training in supporting your workforce to have the right competencies and also as a way of bringing the entire community of your home together.
- Be open to outside expertise and resources to support your staff skills and training needs.
- Adopt positive risk-taking: create a culture of questioning and reflection within the team around balancing risks and rights.
- Use life story work with residents, relatives and staff to help to understand their needs and explore the training implications for your 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.

- Would you as a member of staff be happy for a member of your family to live in the home where you work? If not, then why is that? If you don't think the home would be good enough, then you are the one to start to change it.
 - Do you put yourself in the shoes of the residents? Taking their perspective into consideration is vital in understanding how they feel about being in the home and receiving the service that you provide.
 - How do you view the tasks that you have to perform? Are they chores or do you look at them as opportunities to have some time with the resident. Supporting a resident to get dressed can give you a few minutes with them to chat.
 - When caring for a resident do you look to strengthen your relationship with them? Good relationships instill a good level of trust. This is vital in satisfying residents' sense of security and belonging.
- Do you show residents that you are sensitive to their needs? Every resident is an individual and you need to mould your approach to each one differently.
 - How do you view training? Training gives you opportunities to sharpen and update our skills. Also, you can give examples from your own practice that can inform the practice of others.
 - Can you view your day to day work in a positive light? By building good relationships with residents, relatives and other staff members, you will look forward to being with them.

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



Tŷ John Pathy, 13/14 Neptune Court
Vanguard Way, Cardiff CF24 5PJ
Tel: 029 2043 1555
www.agecymru.org.uk

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