

My home life

Promoting quality of life in care homes for older people

Issue#9

FOR THE
NIGHT
STAFF!

Night staff special issue

Quality of life at night

Providing Good Care at
Night for Older People



This is

My home life



My Home Life is a UK-wide initiative aimed at promoting quality of life for those living, dying, visiting and working in care homes for older people, through relationship-centred care and evidence-based practice.

There are eight evidence-based themes for My Home Life

1. Maintaining identity
2. Sharing decision-making
3. Creating community
4. Managing transitions
5. Improving health and healthcare
6. Supporting good end-of-life

- 7. Promoting a positive culture
- 8. Keeping workforce fit for purpose

- The first three themes are focused on how you approach and personalise care. The next three themes are concerned with how you help navigate residents and relatives through the journey of care. The last two themes are aimed at managers to help them support their staff, put the other six themes into practice and thus transform care.

- Content for this bulletin was produced by Heather Wilkinson and Diana Kerr from University of Edinburgh as part of a project commissioned by Joseph Rowntree Foundation (full details of the study can be found at www.jrf.org.uk)



Good quality care doesn't stop at night

Providing care is a 24-hour job in care homes. Making sure residents are comfortable at night is just as important as caring for them through the day. Sleep is important, yet the role of night-staff is often undervalued.

Many night staff feel under-supported. And there is a sense in which the night-time experiences of residents are not seen to be as important as those of the day time. Yet many residents are awake during the night, and it can be the

- perfect opportunity to establish strong relationships.
- Additionally, a good night's rest can be a big help in engaging with a resident the following day. Our ability to engage with and build relationships with residents is greatly enhanced when the resident is able to have as much unbroken sleep as possible.
- The bottom line is that night staff play a crucial role in promoting good quality care – whether residents are asleep or awake.

Night care radio!

Go online at www.myhomelife.org.uk to follow the experiences of two carers as they carry out their night shift.



Good night!

Night staff have shared with us some simple ideas for making a difference at night:

Sleep tight

Night time can be difficult for many residents. For some - used to the company of a husband or wife at night - the isolation can be distressing. Night staff often welcome these residents to come and join them, making up a bed near them so that they can have the reassurance of company.

The quiet periods at night often allow staff to get to know residents better. It gives them a chance to sit quietly on a one-to-one basis. This is especially important if residents are distressed at night. It gives them a better sense of security, belonging and continuity.

It is in these quiet times that staff can find out how residents are feeling, explore their wants and needs; and have a better sense of connection. Older people don't always sleep well at night, and staff can find out how they feel about that and what might help.

A residents story – Bob –

Bob often got up in the early hours. Instead of trying to get him to bed the care staff built a relationship with him where around 1am he would have some quiet time with them having some tea and toast and then he would go back to sleep – Bob really welcomed some conversation as he had nightmares at night and really missed the company of his wife.

Food for thought

It can be tricky getting the balance right – not enough to eat and drink during the day and a resident will be up in the night hungry or thirsty. Too much to drink will make night time continence harder.

Food and drink may not be the first thing that springs to mind when thinking about night time care, but it can be the perfect time to

help someone eat and/or drink, especially small amounts. Night time snacks can be a source of comfort too.

It is important that staff supervise and monitor fluid and food intake at night, passing on this information to the day staff. Some night staff have found charts helpful.

The noise at night

Between the TV and the dishwasher, buzzers, pagers, creaking floorboards and staff talking, the noise in care homes at night can be overwhelming. Particularly for residents trying to sleep.

In one care home, night staff routinely take time to sit quietly, close their eyes for ten minutes and note all the noises. They then look at how all these noises could be minimised. It's amazing how noisy things sound when you do this.

"One of the nurses came down with a big trolley, and it sounded like thunder"



Artificial light

- Light levels can make quite a difference to restful sleep. People need dark rooms to sleep and dim lights in the corridors to reduce the light filtering into their rooms. But they also need clear light to find their way around in the night. In particular, the toilet door needs to be well lit.

- Some care homes have installed movement-sensitive lighting which comes on or - if already dimly on - brightens when there is movement. The light will dim or go out once the person has moved on.

Managing continence at night

'I am fast asleep and then they open the door and put on the light and I jump awake, my heart jumps and then I cannot get back to sleep'

- Finding the balance between checking residents are dry and comfortable at night and not disturbing them is difficult. Night staff are keenly aware how embarrassed residents can feel if they're not continent at night.

- Undertaking a proper continence assessment is really important in helping to identify the right ways to support a resident in helping them get to the toilet, or in identifying the most appropriate continence aids and pads.

- In one care home, night staff have received support and training from a specialist continence service. They've now introduced night time pads, toilet signs and low level lighting to make the bathrooms clearer – all of which has made a big difference.

Another care home has tried using special pressure mats that alert staff when a resident is out of bed. This works well for residents who may become disorientated or need guidance to get to the toilet. For others, however, it might be an invasion of privacy. It's a question of striking a balance and explaining why lighting helps reduce the need for routine physical checks.

Night time care plans

Some night-staff have created individual care plans for residents at night. These are hugely effective in assessing, recording and communicating the night time needs of residents.

Bringing day staff and night staff together to explore residents' preferences works well. Care planning can include everything around bedtimes/ getting up, frequency of checking (if any) required, continence and nutritional needs at night. This kind of care planning is particularly useful when each member of the night staff has responsibility for certain residents.

Spending the night

A resident, John has been in the home for a few months and is terminally ill with cancer. His wife (ten years his senior) lives in the family home and does not keep good health. John has expressed his sadness at being separated and misses his wife. He is also concerned for her welfare due to her health needs.

Being made aware of this, the manager Sharon discussed with John the possibility of his wife coming to stay in the home (as a visitor, not a service user) for a night on a regular basis. John's wife now stays every week, from Saturday afternoon till Sunday teatime. She is planning to stay for four days over the Christmas period. This obviously has had a tremendous impact on John and his wife.

To check or not to check?
How do you decide how often and for what reasons to check a resident through the night?

Supporting relatives

Some relatives worry about their loved ones and how well they sleep. But, because they visit during the day, they don't meet the night staff or know who to talk to.

In one home, the night staff put photos up with their names on, so relatives can see them when they visit during the day. Day staff also provide names of night-staff so relatives can call and receive reassurance.

Have you tried anything in your workplace to reassure relatives who might be worried about a resident at night?

Thinking about training:

Night staff sometimes miss out on relevant training, partly because it takes place during the day, but also because it doesn't always cover the issues night staff face.

One care home has arranged evening training meetings. Much of this training focuses on dementia and understanding the concerns of a person with dementia at night.

"I am much more clear now about dementia and what experience the person with dementia has. I did not realise that sometimes Elsie's behaviour was because she was in pain. We didn't seem to realise that. Now we give her something for the pain and she is much better. And she is better in the daytime as well I think as she is getting a better rest."



Looking after yourself

Many staff choose to work night shifts, it fits with other parts of their life. However, working at night can mean one's own sleep pattern is disrupted. Inadequate or disturbed sleep, to which night workers are more susceptible, can impact on the body's ability to suppress illness. It is important that night staff have information and support to stay healthy.

Night staff tips for staying healthy

- It can take 6-9 months to adjust to being on nights.
- Organise your sleep time well during the day. Make sure family and friends help you get the sleep you need.
- Eat healthy food, especially fruit and light carbohydrates, at regular times.
- Avoid trying to make it through the night on coffee as it might disrupt your sleep during the day!
- You may feel sick to begin with – and you might feel sick when you come back from holiday or after having time off – until your body adjusts to the different rhythm again.
- Wear loose appropriate clothing as the body can swell at night. Make sure shoes are not too tight.
- Have regular health checks.
- Get as much daylight as possible, when you can.
- You may have problems with concentration. Eye focus may be diminished so take extra care when driving home.

Do you have any healthy tips? How can night staff take better care of themselves to avoid some of the health risks from working nights?

If you are interested in reading more about night time care then there are several free resources (posters, postcards, and an audio play to download to help reflective practice. All available to download from www.jrf.org.uk/nighttimecare.

TOP TEN TIPS!

for a good night

- 1. Quality of sleep** and rest is hugely important for residents. Supporting residents to sleep can have a positive impact upon their wellbeing during the day.
- 2. Individualised night care plans:** Use night time care plans to assess and communicate the needs of each resident. Include regular updates on pain and continence.
- 3. Keyworkers:** Allocating staff to work with individual residents (night key worker system) can increase support for residents at night.
- 4. Noise and light:** Although sometimes unavoidable, constant assessment on how noise and light may be affecting residents sleep is recommended.
- 5. Emotional support:** Night staff play a crucial role in offering support to residents who struggle to sleep at nights and need someone to talk to for reassurance.
- 6. Relatives support:** Find a system to allow night staff and relatives to keep in touch.
- 7. Feeling valued:** Night staff can feel overlooked in terms of support and training. Managers need to make time for night staff to support them at work and identify their training needs.
- 8. Team-building:** The divide between day staff and night staff can make team building difficult. Take time to communicate across these staff groups. Having staff work across day and night shifts can be helpful in minimising the divide.
- 9. Appropriate training:** Night staff sometimes feel overlooked when it comes to training, partly because it takes place during the day.
- 10. Keeping healthy:** Providing night time care on a regular basis can make night staff more vulnerable to health problems. Have clear information available on how night staff can keep healthy when working nights.



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