Inquiry into regulation of care for older people

British Red Cross

We help people in crisis, whoever and wherever they are. We are part of a global network that responds to conflicts, natural disasters and individual emergencies. We enable vulnerable people in the UK and abroad to prepare for and withstand emergencies in their own communities, and when the crisis is over we help them to recover and move on with their lives.

1 The British Red Cross is part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, which comprises:
   - The International Committee of the Red Cross;
   - The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies; and
   - 187 National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies worldwide.

2 As a member of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, the British Red Cross is committed to, and bound by, it's Fundamental Principles. These are: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality.

3 As an auxiliary to government in the UK, we help the emergency services and statutory authorities in any way we can to meet the needs of people affected by emergencies, big or small.

4 In Scotland, the Red Cross has 5,500 volunteers supported by 500 staff members who deliver our humanitarian work in communities across the country. Last year in Scotland we responded to more than 900 emergencies, trained more than 20,000 people in life-saving first aid, assisted more than 700 asylum seekers and refugees and reached more than 15,000 young people with humanitarian education.

5 In relation to health and social care, in Scotland last year we helped 28,000 people live more independently through our health and social care services. We provide valuable time-limited support to vulnerable people, helping them live independently in their own homes – reducing admissions to hospitals, and residential and nursing care.

6 Our largest service is regulated by Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (SCSWIS), and the staff are PVG-checked, and qualified and trained to work with vulnerable adults.

Introduction

The British Red Cross welcomes the opportunity to respond to this inquiry into regulation of care for older people and we are keen to offer our expertise and
share our knowledge in this area. The British Red Cross provides valuable short-term support to vulnerable people in the UK, whether they're recovering from an operation, need a wheelchair or just need help coping around the house.

In Scotland our main regulated health and social care service is Options for Independence, which operates across the country. We also run a regulated Befriending service situated in the Borders. More than 1000 individuals from across Scotland benefit from our regulated care services each year.

Options for Independence is a British Red Cross service in Scotland. We provide a range of supports to meet the individual needs of our service users. They are designed to assist each person to maintain or improve their independence. Options for Independence services support people of all ages from age 16, including older adults who have health or disability issues. By promoting independence, we provide cost-effective services that make a difference to people’s lives.

**Does the regulatory system ensure care services for older people are providing good quality and appropriate care?**

From our experience of providing regulated health and social care services in Scotland we feel that the current system of regulation is designed to insure that service providers meet the basic legal minimum requirements. This is very important, and we feel the current regulatory system performs this function well. The star rating recently introduced is welcome but is not an assurance of quality.

The new Social Care and Social Work Improvement Scotland (SCSWIS) aims to ensure that people receive the highest quality of care and that their rights are promoted and protected. We feel that the current systems could do more to ensure quality care. There are a number of reasons for this listed below, along with some practical ideas that may help to ensure care services for older people are providing good quality care:

- The current inspection regime will reasonably ensure that providers of services comply with the law and meet acceptable standards, which is vital to protect vulnerable individuals. However, meeting acceptable legal standards doesn’t necessarily translate into good quality care.

- At the Red Cross, we are committed to delivery high quality care, and we are working with Quality Scotland on continuous improvement of our health and social care services. Due to the nature of voluntary sector organisations such as ours, they are often embedded in local communities and can provide specialist as well as mainstream services.

- The current system is largely based around announced inspections and we believe that poor quality of service is more likely to be picked up by unannounced inspections or through direct complaints from relatives and friends of the service users.
- We feel that the current system of regulation focuses too heavily on the inspection itself and often the written records that the care providers keep. In our experience, sometimes inspectors focus too much attention on the written records and we feel that these records may not always provide an accurate reflection of the quality and level of service the client receives.
- The Red Cross believes that if there was a greater focus on ensuring quality then there needs to be more engagement from the inspector with the service user and the staff providing the service, as well as friends and family of the service user. We feel that this would give a more comprehensive view on the quality of the service being provided.
- The Red Cross believes that if levels of quality are to be monitored and improved then greater attention needs to be given to detail at all levels of the service provided and in particular to the levels of training staff receives. The current financial climate has had the effect of driving down costs. Local authorities, which have had to deal with significant budget constraints, are the main contractual purchasers of care services from the private and voluntary sectors. There is a high cost in training staff to SVQ3 level, which is seen as the appropriate skill level for home care workers to achieve in order to be able to deliver a quality service to vulnerable people.
- The Red Cross, along with many other voluntary sector service providers, has noted that current tendering processes are driving down the cost of care, which is understandable but ultimately this jeopardises quality which will inevitably mean poorer conditions of service and limited staff training. This in turn will also have an impact on retention of well-trained and experienced staff.

The Red Cross appreciates the opportunity to respond to this inquiry and we hope that our comments are useful. We are happy to provide more detail on any of the above evidence and are available to come to parliament and give oral evidence to the committee should it wish to explore some of this in more detail.

Gurjit Singh
Public Affairs Officer
British Red Cross
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