Can we be confident that the regulatory system is picking up on care services where the quality of care is poor?

I am the relative of someone who has spent the past five years in a care home. Prior to moving to the care home I was witness to the delivery of a range of services to her - care at home, hospital care in general wards and a ‘specialist’ hospital for older people.

In most instances I have, with other family members, been a persistent complainer about poor practice. The complaints have been to the Care Commission / SCSWIS, NHS Managers, politicians and a series of managers in a care home. The outcomes to the complaints have been variable but none have solved the inherent problem – the persistent delivery of poor quality of care, including in some of these complaints, abuse of older people. So my experience is that the regulatory system is not consistently picking up on care services where the quality of care is poor.

Are there any particular weaknesses in the current system?

SCSWIS’s remit is narrow and is a significant limitation for the regulator. Challenging funding, commissioning and also procurement which are all interwoven with service quality is vital if there are to be genuine improvements in the service delivery for older people. There is accountability for the quality of the service that should not always be the sole responsibility of the provider if the specification of the service and price essentially determines the quality.

Another weakness that I perceive is that the care home where our relative lives has four different units. Each unit has a different level of need and obviously a different staff team. The Care Commission / SCSWIS reports therefore make it impossible to determine what good and bad practice is being delivered in what unit and masks poor and best practice within units. We read the report but are not being informed about the service we’re needing to know about.

I also believe that different standards are applied generally to care homes for older people in comparison to support services provided by the third sector. A grade 4 in a care home for older people is not the equivalent to the same grade in the third sector.

Does the system adequately take into account the views of service users?

In my experience there isn’t a particularly sophisticated or thorough system for service users to express their views when communication for a service user is a difficulty.
We have welfare guardianship so we should be approached to speak on our relative’s behalf. In 5 years we have never been asked by the regulatory body what our views were but they persistently ask our relative who consistently says it is ‘a marvellous service and the staff are wonderful’. These comments are usually quoted in the regulator’s report.

Rhona Murray
24 August 2011