Inquiry into regulation of care for older people

Viewpoint Housing Association

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

Not always. There should be more protection for whistleblowers in all sectors, in housing and care homes. Staff and relatives/service users should feel they have the opportunity to go somewhere independent and to be listened to with anonymity if necessary. There should also be factors built in to prevent the malicious complaints also as these create significant staff time wasted in investigations and can be unfounded.

Inspections are not always that regular, or can depend on other factors than the quality of care. We would welcome SCSWIS mystery shoppers, potentially SCSWIS staff from other regions, who could “visit” homes on the basis of being a potential customer.

Are there any particular weaknesses in the current system?

We appreciate that the inspection timetable means priorities need to be made in terms of who to inspect and when, although we are not sure of the rationale of the priorities or whether quality of care is the highest factor in ordering the inspections. Weaknesses highlighted recently at Elsie Ingles and the enquiry into shortcomings there should provide some answers.

No-one asks potential customers who are viewing care homes why they pick a particular home against others. Could these decisions be looked into?

The current style of inspection reports are cumbersome and sometimes difficult to navigate. The grading system is complex and could be more transparent.

Whilst individual inspectors understand the business and operating environment of providers it is not clear that SCSWIS fully understands the impact individual providers’ business decisions can have on the quality of care or on how industry developments can have an impact. Is there any work being done, for example, to see if there is any correlation between Southern Cross’ failed business model and the quality of care provided in its homes? Is SCSWIS corporately scanning the operating environment for any other similar developments?

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

Yes, in our opinion. In our experience the questionnaires and meetings enable a frank discussion between our tenants in receipt of housing support services and SCSWIS officers. We have found the regulator to be very responsive to
service users’ queries. It might be useful to ask service users for their impression on this one.

Reading the inspection reports of the care homes it appears that views are very much taken into account and that they generally respond to concerns or complaints raised by service users or their families.

However, with regard to quality of care this is being eroded through spending cuts and will increasingly lead to more enquiries and emergency situations. Is the Regulatory body sufficiently staffed up to deal with these? In our experience services hours are reducing, day care centres closing and meals costs increasing with no consultation with service users. This reduces individuals’ choice, and this is happening with little warning.

Regular care workers who know the elderly individual can spot changes in health, behaviour and well-being and can raise issues with the relevant support networks pre-empting an emergency situation. This could be eroded with regular changes in support staff leading to reactive rather than pro-active care which is less cost effective.

**Does the registration and regulatory system provide an appropriate basis for the regulation, inspection and enforcement of integrated social and NHS care in the community?**

It is difficult to answer this as we are not operating in areas where are seeing full integration.

Julia Murray  
New Business Project Manager  
Viewpoint Housing Association  
10 August 2011