

**Scottish Parliament Health and Sport Committee**

**Care Home Sustainability**

**November 2017**

Following the announcement from Bield Housing Association that they are withdrawing from the residential care sector, the Health and Sport Committee are carrying out an evidence session on care home sustainability based around the following two questions:

1. What impact does the recent announcement of the closure of 12 residential care homes have on your area?
2. Are there concerns regarding the sustainability of residential service provision (in your area)? and if so, how could they be addressed?

The RCN recognises the significant impact on both residents and staff following the closure of Bield's residential care homes in Scotland. The continuity of care and quality of care for people affected should be a priority for all involved in finding alternatives for residents. The RCN feels strongly that this should not be allowed to become a regular occurrence and welcomes the committee's evidence session on care home sustainability.

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) response to the committee will be focused on the role of registered nursing in care home sustainability and the need to ensure the right staff are in the right place at the right time in order to ensure safe, effective, good quality care is delivered in care homes. Support workers working with nurses in care homes are also vital to upholding quality care and their contribution must be valued and recognised within care home teams.

People in Scotland are living longer, but are increasingly likely to be living with multiple long term conditions, frailty and complex care needs as they age.<sup>1</sup> Our members and partners regularly confirm this and report that people living in care homes are increasingly requiring clinical interventions beyond the perceived traditional role of care home staff.

### **Sustainability**

The RCN is aware that the care home sector is under great pressure and understands why there are deep concerns regarding sustainability. Care home residents are older and have far more complex clinical care needs than ever before at the same time as the sector is

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<sup>1</sup> ISD, *Care Home Census*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. 2015

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struggling to recruit and retain staff. It is for that reason, that it is increasingly important to develop a care home workforce which is responsive, flexible, and has the right skill mix to meet service users' needs.

Currently, services are operating with high levels of vacancies which are difficult to recruit to, this in turn can lead to increased agency spend which has financial implications for providers. The right staff with the right skills must be available at the right time and in the right place in order to meet the higher levels of need of residents to ensure high quality, safe and person centred care is delivered. The Care Inspectorate report on staff vacancies in care services further highlights these staffing pressures. In 2016:

- Care homes for older people had a particularly high proportion of reported problems filling vacancies<sup>2</sup>
- Private care homes for older people had the highest proportion of services with nursing vacancies (58% of services)<sup>3</sup>

It is also important to note that 64% of nurses currently working in care homes are over the age of 45.<sup>4</sup> This statistic is the general trend across health and social care. The health care sector as a whole, therefore, urgently needs better workforce planning and succession planning to ensure that there is an appropriately qualified and skilled workforce with the right skill mix available for the future.

It is important to note that there is significant pressure on the nursing workforce as a whole with high vacancies in the NHS and care homes. The RCN fully supports calls to make working in the care home sector an attractive career path for nurses and support workers, and for action to be taken right across health and social care and from the very start of nurses' education in our universities, to promote the benefits to nurses of working in care homes.

The right resources need to be in place to ensure there is the appropriate mix of professional skills available to meet the changing and growing needs of residents. Without this, uncertainty in the ability to provide appropriate care within the sector will continue. We await confirmation of how the care home sector may be included in the Scottish Government's plans to introduce legislation on safe and effective staffing.

### **The significance of the registered nurse role for quality care in care homes**

There is a growing international body of evidence on how access to stable, registered nurse staffing in care homes delivers positive care outcomes for residents as well as improved

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<sup>2</sup> The Care Inspectorate, *Staff vacancies in care services. 2016, pg5*

<sup>3</sup> The Care Inspectorate, *Staff vacancies in care services. 2016, pg10*

<sup>4</sup> Scottish Care, *Independent Nursing Sector Data. 2017*

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quality of life.<sup>5,6</sup> Registered nurses lead, coordinate and deliver this person-centred care and provide continuity of relationship within the homely setting of the care home. As residents' complexity of need increases, the skills, competencies and availability of the registered nursing workforce employed within care homes will become ever more important. The benefits of registered nurses working in care homes are clear:

- RNs can recognise and take action when a person's condition is deteriorating to avoid unnecessary hospital admission, support a seamless transition from hospital back into the care home, and reduce the need for support from the overstretched district nurse and GP workforce;
- RNs are responsible for the overall management of the resident's nursing care, and they lead, clinically supervise, delegate care to, and oversee the team of carers and senior carers.

It is important to note that where the right clinical expertise and skill is not available, potential issues can arise in terms of the quality of care for the individual, and also other residents' right to a safe environment within their home. The RCN is clear that in order to have a workforce that can meet the needs of residents in care homes and provide a sustainable service, there needs to be further investment and recruitment to the registered nurse role.

The RCN is committed to the principle of a national care home contract as the best means of providing care to people in care homes across Scotland. The new contract does, however, need to recognise the role of registered nurses as a fundamental element of any team delivering care and it is essential that care homes in Scotland have teams which include registered nurses. Without this there is a real risk to the care that people receive and the sustainability of the industry.

## RCN Principles

The RCN has developed [a set of principles for nursing care in care homes](#). These principles are designed around the needs and aspirations of individuals, and focus on providing high quality, person-centred sustainable care. The RCN would like these principles to inform the development of the care home sector, including the National Care Home Contract. The below points provide an overview of RCN's key principles for nursing care in care homes.<sup>7</sup>

1. Care homes are contracted and monitored on the basis of agreed outcomes
  - Commissioning and procurement of care home services must take a standardised outcomes approach
  - An outcomes-based procurement approach sets out the quality outcomes that are expected to be met through procurement of a service

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<sup>5</sup> Shin and Bae. 2012. Nurse staffing, quality of care, and quality of life in U.S. nursing homes, 1996-2011

<sup>6</sup> Shin, Park and Huh. 2014. Nursing staffing and quality of life in Western New York nursing

<sup>7</sup> Further information is available here - <https://www.rcn.org.uk/about-us/policy-briefings/sco-pol-nursing-in-care-homes>

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2. Funding and staffing are appropriate to meet the care needs of residents
  - Funding for care home services must be determined on the basis of accurate information about both the dependency and clinical need of individual residents, and the staff required to meet those needs
  - Criteria for admissions to contracted care home beds must be matched by the capacity and capability of the registered nurses available on site
3. Care home staff can escalate issues in a timely way, and access advice and support from a multidisciplinary team
  - Appropriate senior clinical decision makers and clear escalation processes are in place 24/7 to ensure the best care for residents and avoid unnecessary admission to hospital
  - Patient information systems enable the appropriate sharing of information in a timely way
4. There are clear career pathways in care homes
  - There is a consistent approach to developing a sustainable care home workforce nationally and within health and social care partnerships
  - There are fair terms and conditions for registered nurses employed within care homes, recognising the different levels of practice appropriate to the health care needs of residents
5. Care homes are positive learning environments
  - Registered nurses working in care homes have ongoing clinical supervision
  - Registered nurses in care homes have the time and funding to access the continuing professional development they need to provide high quality care, according to the needs of their residents
  - Registered nurses working in care homes are supported to mentor and supervise nursing students, where homes meet NES placement standards
6. There are robust clinical and care governance arrangements in place, and clear lines of professional accountability for registered nurses
  - There is a structure within the integration authority for monitoring and assuring quality of nursing care in commissioned services
  - Robust processes within care homes for assuring care quality and safety, with clear lines of professional accountability for registered nurses
  - Registered nurses employed in care homes are facilitated to work to the top of their scope of practice and be clinical leaders in their workplaces
  - An improvement approach is taken within all care homes focused on identifying, understanding and learning from mistakes

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7. Regulation and scrutiny support the provision and improvement of high quality care
- There is appropriate scrutiny and regular review of care, to ensure people with complex health needs receive care from nursing staff
  - There is a harmonised approach to scrutiny across older people's services, based on the National Care Standards, which is appropriate to all settings

## Conclusion

Staff with the right skills, in the right place at the right time are vital to ensuring the sustainability of care homes and the provision of good quality, safe effective care for residents. Overall, the RCN has real concerns about the sustainability of the care home sector and its ability to meet the increasing complex needs of care home residents. Failure to address sustainability concerns will impact both patient care as well as the morale and wellbeing of staff working in Scottish care homes.

The importance of the role registered nurses play in care homes cannot be underestimated and not having the right number of RNs in this sector would add significantly to the workload of the already under pressure district nursing and GP teams. Support workers working with nurses in care homes must also have their valuable contribution recognised. Appropriate investment in staff and improved workforce planning that recognises the increasingly complex needs of residents, would work towards sustainability and contribute to maintain safe effective care in care homes.

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