

Oakcroft Care Home November/December 2011

Why bother asking? Getting feedback from care home residents especially those with memory or communication difficulties.

Early in 2011 we carried out a pilot project in Fieldside Care Home in Catford South East London. My role in our Local Involvement Network (Lewisham LINK) is to engage with a wide range of individuals from all walks of life in the London Borough of Lewisham. This includes those with disabilities or long-term health conditions and those in care homes. I was invited to lead a discussion about our work in health and social care service improvement with residents of a local care home as part of their regular residents meeting.

This proved to be an effective means of engaging with a seldom-heard group of vulnerable people. Using visual aids and hand gestures it was possible to learn about people's experiences of health and social care services in Lewisham Borough. Apart from helping to inform service delivery on a wider scale this approach also added individual intelligence that is used by care providers in the design and implementation of personalised care plans.

The initial project is now being developed and applied in 2 more care homes including Oakcroft Nursing Home. An initial meeting with residents of each home has been carried out and an overall impression of both the good practice and service improvement areas is elicited. Most of the participants of the groups are able to offer verbal feedback with some support and this will form the basis of future engagement activity.

Using various communication aids the first group completed at Oakcroft allowed residents the chance to have an open discussion without care staff participation. What was also evident from this first session was the support that residents offered each other.

In addition to gaining positives and negatives feedback on specific subjects like the local hospital, GP services and dentists, additional information was also elicited. Residents commented on a range of topics (Appendix B) including family bereavements and services from other areas of the country though to their very positive experience of the food in the care homes. Some of this information has now been provided to the care manager and in some cases has already raised awareness of individual choice in health and social care needs. Some

of this information had not been elicited during other perhaps more formal assessment processes.

There was a genuine sense of engagement and freedom in most of the interactions with residents, despite the communication or memory difficulties. One particular resident who had recently moved to Oakcroft stated that "I had almost given up follow my husbands death".

This short engagement pilot was rewarding to some of the residents and to me. It allowed Lewisham LINK to gather local intelligence from a rarely engaged group and gave the staff team feedback on the home and the service provided. This could be a useful tool for any care home and the pilot home has also been provided with a copy of the visual aids used. "If you don't ask you don't get", so engagement is so important if services are to meet the needs of individuals and marginalised groups in our community.

I would like to thank, Oakcroft Nursing Home and their manager Cecilia Henry, who invited me, and the rest of the team led by Gill Hennell (Manager). I would also like to thank the residents who participated in the group and one to one sessions.

It is now hoped that this engagement approach can be developed for use in other homes in and around Lewisham.

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Lewisham LINK (Local Involvement Network)
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Appendix A. Visual Aid for Lewisham Hospital



Hospital

Good



Bad



Appendix B. Example commentaries from group session at Oakcroft.
(Verbatim Reporting).

1	Food very good here, last week we had beef, turkey and chicken dinners.
2	The manager: always has time for you and is caring
3	All the staff are good and always have a smile for you
4	The GP: is good who comes here
5	I almost gave up but since I moved here I feel a lot better
6	Sometimes we are put to bed early and miss the end of the film
7	I do not like being sat at the dinner table and then waiting for an hour for dinner
8	2 residents felt that they new that others had higher levels of need but they had to wait a long time after pressing the call button.
9	We enjoy the activities but they could be more often but we do play bingo, skittles cares and do craft activities in groups and 1 to 1
10	I love it here and I love the food