

Moving to a Care Home

by Sally Bundock

Much of life is about making decisions – some big and some small. Whether or not to move to a care home is one of those bigger decisions that many of us will be involved in at some point in our lives. An individual may be considering the best way forward for themselves or for a loved one or a person they have been caring for. In making that all important decision ideally all possible alternatives and relevant information should be considered.

In the first instance anyone who feels that they need help with everyday living because of health, frailty or dementia should request assessment of their care and support needs from their local Adult Social Care Services Department. An individual is entitled to a Needs Assessment (also known as a Community Care Assessment) regardless of whether or not they can afford to pay for services. If the person has a carer then they can request a Carer's Assessment. A Needs Assessment can be carried out at home, in hospital and in some areas by a self-assessment procedure.

A Needs Assessment is the first stage of getting the help an individual may need with care and support. It must take place before any Financial Assessment is made by the council with respect to ability to pay and is advisable even if someone will be part or fully self-paying for the care and support needed.

The Needs Assessment is a comprehensive analysis of a person's needs. Its findings may be that a move to a care home is a sensible option but it should also offer alternatives such as increased support at home or information about entitlement to other forms of housing. If a person's needs are assessed as being below the level for care home support then a place in a care home would only be available by self-funding.

In carrying out a Needs Assessment the social worker or care manager should consider the full circumstances as well as the views of others involved in the person's care such as their GP. The individual concerned should be fully involved and able to state their preferences and choices. If a move to a care home is a distinct possibility then a "comprehensive assessment" will take place which will include an assessment of psychological and social needs e.g. to be close to family.

If, following a Needs Assessment and Financial Assessment, the council states that it will contribute all or part of the cost of the care, a Care Plan will be drawn up which the individual would need to agree and sign. If the council would not be contributing to cost a Care Plan would not be written. It is important, however, that the individual obtain a copy of the Needs Assessment as they would require it if seeking an appropriate home for their needs.

Even if a person is assessed as needing care in a care home, there may well be ways to remain at home if that is the person's preference. All possible alternatives may be discussed with the council as part of the Needs Assessment. Services to help a person remain at home include:

- Help with personal care - bathing and dressing
- Nursing and other health care
- Support for carers who look after the person
- Delivered meals
- Special equipment to help the person manage in the home
- Community alarm services/telecare support
- Day care services

From April 2013 everyone who receives financial help from social services for care will have a 'personal budget'. Its aim is to give individuals more control, and to ensure that the services received meet the person's particular needs and wishes e.g. the right to choose who provides care in the home. A person can manage the budget themselves via direct payments or have it managed by the local council or nominated person.

As well as services delivered in the home, they may want to consider other housing alternatives. Examples are:

- Sheltered housing
- Very sheltered or Extra Care Housing
- Housing specially designed or adapted for older/disabled people
- Homeshare (a person offers set hours of care pw in exchange for basic accommodation)

The social worker or the Elderly Accommodation Counsel (0800 377 70 70 www.housingcare.org) can provide comprehensive listings of specialist older people's housing in any area of the UK. It also has useful factsheets.

Following a hospital stay and before discharge important decisions may need to be made concerning a person's care. Initially a move to a care home may seem the best option. However, the NHS and the council can arrange for a person to enter a care home or similar for a period of rehabilitation to help them regain their independence to move back to their own home. This "intermediate care" is provided free of charge in England for up to 6 weeks. For the same period free Re-enablement Services are also available providing help to people in their own homes to regain confidence and skills to cope with everyday activities.



In essence there are a large number of options to carefully weigh up before making the move to a care home. There are likely to be many emotions involved. As an individual making the choice for themselves there are fears of the unknown and loss of familiar surroundings. There can, however, also be positive feelings for the increased contact with people and daily support that will be available. If a person has been a carer (as a spouse or parent) they may feel that they are letting the person down in supporting the move but if things have become very difficult it is often better to make a sensible move to residential or nursing care rather than continue until things become unmanageable.

A carer can still visit a person on a regular basis in a care home and offer invaluable support and care. The final decision may be hard to make but if everything is carefully discussed and a care home is the best option then the next step is to ensure that the home is very carefully chosen.

Choosing a person's care home is a positive step for their future. It is going to be their home and it is

important that it is somewhere they feel comfortable and confident about moving to. Everyone has a choice about where they move to even if the council is paying the full cost. Choice is more limited, however, when NHS funding is involved.

Living in a care home is expensive and most people will have to pay towards the fees. The council's Financial Assessment will state the weekly amount they are able to contribute to a person's assessed needs. In determining this figure they will take into account income and assets. If a person has savings and capital above a certain level they will be a "self-funder" and will be expected to pay the full fees of the home. The limit for April 2013/14 is £23,250 - England, £23,750 - Wales (£25,250 in Scotland where the rules are somewhat different with free personal care provided for over 65s). These figures are reviewed annually with the whole issue of care home funding being currently the subject of much discussion in government.

A person's home is considered in the Financial Assessment but if a spouse or other dependent still lives there then the house cannot be sold to

pay for fees. The rules for Financial Assessment are reasonably complicated but the outcome will be fully explained. Whatever the situation an individual will retain a Personal Expenses Allowance each week in the care home for personal items e.g. a daily newspaper. For 2013/14 this is £23.90 pw in England and Scotland (£24.50 in Wales). The council has the discretion to increase this amount.

If the person moving to the care home is likely to have difficulties with managing their own finances there are a number of alternatives for example a Third Party Mandate, an Ordinary or Enduring Power of Attorney. If a person becomes incapable of managing their money and an attorney has not been appointed the Court of Protection can step in. The home should only be responsible for managing a person's money as a last resort.

There are two types of care home, residential and nursing. If a person is assessed as needing NHS Continuing Healthcare this will be funded, regardless of financial status, by the NHS whether it is provided in a care home or elsewhere. A GP can advise.

If the council is contributing towards the cost of the home, a person has the right to choose any home in England or Wales (the rules are different for Scotland) as long as the council agrees that it meets 4 key points. It is suitable for the person's care needs, there is a place available, the council and the owner of the home can agree a contract to ensure that the person is properly cared for and the cost is not more than the council will normally pay for someone with the assessed needs. If the care home selected is too expensive for the council then it may still be possible to move to that home if a third party e.g. a benevolent fund, agrees to pay a top-up fee. If a person is self-funding then they may select any home that meets their needs and they are able to agree a contract with. If a person's funds are likely to run out it may be appropriate to choose a home that is within the council's funding structure to avoid a

continued overleaf

possible future move. Seeking independent financial advice for fund planning is an option.

A person may already know of a home they would like to enter perhaps through a friend's recommendation. Social workers at the local authority Social Services Department or hospital may be able to provide a list. The Elderly Accommodation Council's website (see above) is a good source of information on care homes. It provides details of each home and is also linked to the Care Quality Commission (CQC) website where the latest and earlier inspections of a home may be viewed. There are a number of websites of varying quality giving details of care homes. Some add ratings of a small number of individuals and/or link to out-of-date CQC inspection reports. The Care Inspectorate in Scotland and the Care & Social Services Inspectorate Wales operate similarly to the CQC. In considering inspection reports it must be understood that inspections are currently carried out (unannounced) only once per year unless more frequent visits are programmed because improvements are required. Plans to increase inspections, the inspection categories and training for inspectors are under way but will take some time to implement.

Once the person has narrowed down the care homes for consideration visits need to be planned. It is important to ask the right questions of the Home Manager to establish whether the home is able to meet the individual's needs in terms of care as well as psychological well being. The types of things a person will want to consider relating to independence will include going out, choosing who visits them and when and so on. An informal chat with other residents will be beneficial. Age UK (0800 169 6565 www.ageuk.org.uk), Age Northern Ireland, Age Scotland and Age Cymru provide a wealth of information. Their Care Home Checklist will be particularly useful when visiting a home. A copy of the care home's most recent inspection report and its Statement of Purpose can be requested. The Alzheimer's Society (0300 222 11 22 www.alzheimers.org.uk) can assist when choosing a home for a person with dementia.

For pet lovers, The Cinnamon Trust (01736 757 900 www.cinnamon.org.uk) has a Pet Friendly Care Home Register listing care homes and retirement housing happy to accept residents with pets.

Once the care home has been selected a detailed contract will be drawn up between the council and the care home or the self-funder and the care home. If the self-funder needs assistance with the contract the council can help. The Office of Fair Trading provides a guide to unfair terms in privately funded care home contracts. If a place is not immediately available in the chosen home interim arrangements can be made.



Before the move takes place there will be much to think about and plans to be made, for example which personal belongings to take to the new home.

Once the person has moved to the care home, the care home staff should work with them to make a Care Plan specific to their life in the care home. It should set out needs and what the person wants to achieve in the future. The plan should encourage the person's independence and will include a risk assessment of what a person wants to do for themselves. It should be updated regularly to reflect changing needs. If the council is paying the fees, it must carry out a review of the person's needs and how the care home is meeting them, 3 months after they move in and annually thereafter. If a person wishes they may make an 'advance care plan' with the home for a decline in health and their final days.

The care home the person has chosen is their home and they should not feel intimidated or be subjected to abuse of any kind whatsoever. They should not be given any medication or drugs that they, or the person they have agreed to represent them, do not agree to. The person should be supported by staff to maintain a good quality of life including continuing with personal hobbies and interests. In the majority of cases the new resident will have their own room and the option for private as well as social time. They retain their own rights as a citizen including the right to vote.

Residents in care homes generally welcome visitors and much value.

time spent with friends and family During visits there will be private time to talk and for loved ones to pick up any signs if life at the home for the resident is not running as smoothly as it should. Calm discussion will help determine whether there is a fairly simple issue that can be easily resolved or whether there is need for more formalised action. It is important to be realistic and accept that whilst many people have a very positive experience of living in a care home, difficulties can arise especially when the person receiving care is frail and vulnerable and not perhaps easily able to express themselves. It is important to raise concerns if any arise.

If there is an issue whilst in a care home then the resident or their personal representative should begin by making their concerns known to the Care Home Manager. All care homes should have their own

Complaints Procedure which should be freely available. If a person is dissatisfied with the response or they do not wish to discuss the complaint with the staff at the home, a complaint to an Inspection Officer at the CQC (or equivalent bodies for Wales and Scotland) may be made. It is important to be aware that the CQC does not investigate individual complaints but registers complaints for consideration during their next inspection which may be brought forward.

If a person wishes to pursue a complaint against the local council Adult Social Care Services or against the NHS concerning free NHS continuing Healthcare then there are Complaints Procedures to follow with the option to appeal to other government bodies. It is important when making a complaint to be very clear about the issues involved and to keep an accurate record throughout.

An invaluable and unique resource to help with any concerns related to care homes is The Relative & Residents Association (020 7359 8136 www.relres.org). Their Helpline provides much information including rights under guidance and regulations, and the benefits and standards to expect.

The Care Home Handbook produced by Independent Age (Counsel & Care) (0845 262 1863 www.independentage.org) is an essential read. It sets out a person's rights, their choices and the control and independence they should be able to retain throughout the process.

A move to a care home may be a difficult decision to make but in most cases it marks a positive new beginning.

Forming good relationships and friendships with staff and other residents can help to make the new home a safe and comfortable place to be.

