

Education is needed to enable carers to meet NICE standards

Menna Lloyd Jones

The plight of our older people suffering neglect, malnutrition and abuse in care homes and hospital was highlighted in the press recently after the publication of a report by the Joint Committee on Human Rights (2007). Headlines decried the 'shameful betrayal of our elderly' after the report gave examples of poor care. Criticisms included examples of patients with pressure ulcers that were left untreated because staff felt it was not their job to treat them. Having considered this, I question whether this was a deliberate neglect or if it is simply that these carers lack the knowledge to give these patients the appropriate treatment.

I visit care homes every day. Although some care homes are run by social services the patients that I see are cared for in the private sector. I would say that the majority of these patients receive care that varies from good to excellent.

In general I have been happy to supervise the care of patients with multiple pressure ulcers in care homes, knowing that the care they will receive will be as good if not better than the care they would receive in hospital and often patients are transferred to these care homes from hospital with existing pressure ulcers. Over the past eight years I have developed a close working relationship with the staff in these care homes. They attend study days and link nurse meetings and they welcome any educational help that they are offered and are very keen to learn.

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The nursing staff that I have spoken with have demonstrated an understanding of tissue viability issues. They are capable of selecting appropriate equipment for their patients and they are very aware of the risks that the seated patient is exposed to. They utilise repositioning charts and they address their patients' nutritional needs to the best of their ability, referring them to a dietician when appropriate.

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence has set the national standards but what is missing is the education to support the standards and enable them to be met. Tissue viability is an integral part of the care given to older people and pressure ulcer management and basic education about wound care should be mandatory.

But what about staff in care homes that have not asked for help, that do not encourage staff to attend study days or do not have access to tissue viability nurses? How can we know if the care in these homes is of a similar standard? We simply do not know.

Recently I had involvement with care home inspectorates following a complaint I had made about a lack of knowledge about pressure ulcer management within a home. When I spoke to one of the inspectors about this, I became concerned about his/her apparent lack of knowledge on this subject too. How can these inspectors oversee care and set standards for

others when they do not understand the principles of pressure ulcer management themselves?

The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE, 2005) has set the national standards but what is missing is the education to support the standards and enable them to be met. Tissue viability is an integral part of the care given to older people and pressure ulcer management and basic education about wound care should be mandatory — not only for nurses but for all those who care for or oversee the care of patients at risk.

Not all care home workers have access to study days and they therefore need education that is easy for them to access and is delivered in a format that is clear and simple to understand, preferably in their place of work. With modern technology this should not be difficult.

What is really needed is the support of social services and care home inspectorates to ensure that all staff working in care homes have access to the necessary education and are able to keep themselves up to date with the latest developments in the field. Setting a standard is only the beginning — it is ensuring that it is met that is the real challenge and will be the key to avoiding further 'betrayals' of older people in the UK. [WUK](#)

Joint Committee on Human Rights (2007) *Eighteenth Report. The Human Rights of Older People in Healthcare*. The Stationery Office, London

National Institute for Clinical Excellence (2005) *Pressure Ulcers — Prevention and Treatment*. NICE, London