



Living in a Care Home

Dying with dignity

Home from home

Most of us die at home. It is likely that, if your relative lives in a care home, then they will die there. Death is a fact of life in care homes and so dealing with death in a sensitive and dignified manner should be part of the natural process of caring for elderly people.

Matters of life and death

Death is a common feature of life in homes for older people and at any one time there may be a number of people in the end of life phase and so staff should be as well prepared for handling this eventuality as they are for other aspects of daily life.

But death is an individual process. Control over what happens should, wherever possible, rest with the resident who should be helped to make decisions and express their wishes in advance. Older people are seldom as reluctant as younger ones to discuss death; they will have lost their parents, many will have lost partners, and some will have lost children.

Special religious or cultural requirements or personal preferences should be discussed with the home beforehand and recorded in the resident's care plan. Arrangements for relatives, who the resident would like to see and, perhaps, who they would not like to see, can all be recorded clearly so that there are no misunderstandings at the crucial time.

Special care

Residents may need extra care at the time of death. Palliative care, which is to do with relieving the symptoms of disease and, in particular, supplying effective pain relief, should be available in the care home through registered nurses on the staff team or by bringing in district nurses or specialist nurses and equipment, and from the GP. People living in care homes have the same rights as people living in their own home to specialist services available in the community.

However homes must know their limitations and there will be situations where hospital care is inevitable and preferable.

Supporting relatives

Some homes may be able to offer guest accommodation for you to stay in during the final days or hours of your relative's life. Sometimes the accommodation maybe a little more basic with a mattress on the floor. What is more important than the practical arrangements is how you are made to feel by the staff at the home.

Being treated as being in the way when you are trying to care for your relative will be very upsetting but don't forget that the staff have a job to do. Caring for your relative and making them as comfortable as possible is their priority. Successful homes will be efficient while also being sensitive to the needs of the resident and their loved ones.

Saying goodbye

It is likely that your relative will have made friends with other residents, and with members of staff. If the funeral is hosted away from the home an invitation to residents and staff would be much appreciated, just as attendance by residents and staff is often very valued by relatives. If the funeral starts from the home frail friends can say their goodbyes there if attendance at the funeral itself is too much for them.