



## Thinking about...improving practice

### No. 1: Setting the scene

The idea behind this series of **Briefings** for staff working with older people who live in care homes is to stimulate discussion about some of the most common problems, issues and concerns raised by relatives and others. They are intended to be useful for staff and to build on and reinforce good practice.

We believe that there is a great deal of good practice going on each day that enables residents to enjoy a good quality of life. There is growing awareness of the small things that can make a big difference to residents' lives.

National campaigns like *Dignity in Care* have attracted attention to a number of issues and there have been a series of other initiatives including work by the British Geriatrics Society – a doctors' organisation - aimed at ensuring that older people receiving hospital care are enabled to use the toilet in private. Continuing debate on phasing out single sex hospital wards is also part of this wider discussion of how to protect patients' dignity.

Sometimes homes are presented as if they had all the problems experienced by hospital patients as well as those that go with running a home! Sadly, care homes, their managers, and the staff working in them are most likely to come to the attention of the general public as a result of stories of neglect, mistreatment, abuse or when things go wrong as a result of falls or illness.

#### **Out of the ordinary?**

It doesn't seem to matter that such events may be the exception rather than the rule – this is the way that homes are seen by many people who have never set foot inside one. A succession of 'undercover' reports and accounts of poor practice by former staff have provided evidence that sometimes things we should be ashamed of do occur, and can go unchallenged for too long.

The good work building relationships with residents so that they are able to lead fuller lives goes unnoticed and unreported. Yet this is right at the heart of good care – getting to know residents individually – and getting beyond a list of difficulties and disabilities that lead to the big step of moving into a care home, and instead understanding them and their past, and supporting them to live life as fully as possible.

#### **Policies...and personal practices**

Homes are required to have policies relating to the prevention of abuse, and while we think this is important it is what staff do that matters most of all.

So, how **you** go about your work, the attitudes **you** have towards residents, their families, your colleagues and your managers are what count when residents and their relatives think about why they like their home.

Are there things that you do especially well, that residents, colleagues or managers have passed comment on? Are there things that you see a colleague do less well? Or perhaps there is someone who finds some tasks difficult and as a result does them less well.

### **What we want to do**

We want to help staff to feel proud of their work, spread good practice and drive out any abusive behaviour that may have taken root in people's daily practice.

We know how busy you are, and so we don't want to overload you with lots of paperwork, folders and files that you may have little or no time to read.

### **What's next?**

We have tried out some ideas with staff from a range of different homes - some large, some much smaller - to find out which approaches work best, and why.

We are now distributing some of the ideas and experiences more widely so that people working in care homes in a range of different roles can learn from one another. If you would like a copy of our first **Briefing** on:

**Privacy**

**Mealtimes**

**Continence**

Please write, call or e-mail specifying which title(s) you want.

### **Tell us what you think**

We have developed these briefings by talking with people who work in homes and listening to what they have to say about the difficulties and dilemmas they confront day by day. We have also drawn on conversations with relatives who have called our help line to talk about things that worry them.

We want you to tell us if we've got it right – and ideas for other topics that could benefit from straightforward, practical and above all short briefings like this one.

## **Think small, think personal – make a difference.**

### **Contact us!**

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*We are grateful to **Comic Relief** for their financial support for this programme of work*