



Thinking aboutImproving practice

No. 6: Choices

Everyday activity

We all expect to be given choices about things we buy, and the services we use so that, for example doctor's surgeries now operate extended hours and shops open at weekends. So, it's reasonable for residents and their families to expect to be given choices about how the way they live their life in a care home.

As part of their commitment to high standards people working in care homes have been trying to enable residents to express choices about all kinds of things affecting their daily routines for many years.

Some kinds of choice present more difficulties than others, for instance it's easier to manage a 'staggered start' to the day, with breakfast being offered over a much longer period of time than seems either desirable or possible for the main meal of the day, generally at lunchtime. Choosing what to eat – from a range of possible choices – is now firmly established as routine rather than out of the ordinary but again may present problems in cooking sufficient quantities of each of the meals available on any given day.

Priority for action

The overall theme of this series of briefings for staff is that **you** can do small things that make a big difference to residents' lives. So, identifying the things that you can affect is the starting point.

- Ensure that residents are assisted to make choices about things that matter to them – there may be some 'core' themes that affect everybody, but there will be other matters that are all about individual choices
- Start with those topics over which staff have greatest control and therefore most likelihood of being able to demonstrate their commitment

- Review as a staff group the topics identified in this way to see where collective action needs to be taken or policies changed
- Timing of some activities may create the biggest headaches for residents, and staff. But some of them can be adjusted more readily: think about making a list of the 'easy' topics and the more 'difficult' or 'challenging' ones
- Try to explain why something is not possible, rather than simply saying "sorry I can't manage to do that"
- Record details of residents' choices in their care plans - but don't make the mistake of thinking that today's preference is tomorrow's too!

Obstacles to making this happen

Individuals' choices may conflict with one another, causing you to have to think through ways of mediating between two or more people. Sorting out these conflicts may take time and eat into the time you had set aside to assist residents in fulfilling their wishes.

This more individualised approach may show up some of the existing 'pinch points' - times when all staff are under pressure, such as in the morning when helping people to get up or get washed – and may cause the management team to think about the best use of staff time. In doing this it may make choice even more problematic.

Residents are more likely to be understanding and prepared to compromise if they are told of the difficulties staff have in meeting lots of needs at the same time. Use residents meetings to describe the problems and to get agreement on the best ways of managing the situation to the benefit of residents and staff.

Think small, think personal – make a difference.

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