



Thinking about...improving practice

No. 2: Privacy

Private lives

Moving into a care home is a big decision that brings about many changes to people's daily lives.

Some of these changes will be welcomed by residents and their families because they bring greater safety and security, as well as the companionship that may be found from being with other residents.

But there will be other changes that they will have been less well prepared for and which may feel intrusive. Life may feel altogether more 'public' - with staff discussing matters related to their own or another resident's care in front of others, for example care staff, residents, relatives, and visiting professionals such as doctors, inspectors or care managers.

Sometimes breaches of privacy may not be about what we say, but what we do - for example whether doors are shut when intimate care is being given or discussed. Or whether doors to toilets and bathrooms - located in areas where 'passers by' can unwittingly catch a glimpse of someone - are always kept closed and have signs stating whether they are '*engaged*' or '*vacant*'.

While residents may choose to keep the door to their own room open - so that they can 'watch the world go by' - some may choose to have it closed, yet find that this is not respected, either by people coming in the room, or when they leave it.

One way of thinking about the importance of this topic is to consider when the last time was that someone, a stranger or a friend, perhaps of the opposite sex, saw you washing, dressing or preparing to get into the bath?

Priority for action

There are some simple rules, most likely already written down as the home's policy, that any carer can follow to ensure that privacy is upheld:

- Never enter a resident's room without knocking and waiting to be invited to enter – *your knowledge of **individuals** will help you to decide whether you need to vary this due to, for example, poor hearing, or concern about risks to health*

- When leaving a resident's room always ask whether the occupant would prefer that you close the door, or leave it open
- Never assume you know the answer to that question on the basis of the resident's previous answers – today, or any other day.
- Someone happy to have the door wide open yesterday, or even earlier today, may want the door closed for peace from the sounds of others, for personal privacy, to avoid being distracted while watching or listening to a favourite programme, or simply as a change
- Always avoid discussing private matters in public spaces, whether with the resident, family members, other members of staff, or visiting professionals

Obstacles to making this happen

Paying attention to people's privacy is neither expensive nor difficult – it simply needs thought so that your behaviour at work is respectful of people's rights and wishes.

Time may be the enemy of best practice – it may seem quicker and easier to be able to go in and out of rooms without knocking or having to open them, or having conversations with people whenever and wherever you see them.

But what seems easy and convenient may cause problems that take time both to sort out, and to deal with hurt feelings.

If there is sufficient space it makes sense to create a quiet room where conversations of a sensitive nature can take place out of sight and away from other 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*