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## Moving to a care home

The move from one's own home to a care home is a major life change, and often the last move we will ever make. It will probably mean the loss of relationships as well as of an environment in which many emotions and memories are invested (Forte, Cotter and Wells, 2006; Chaudhury, 2003; Tester et al, 2003; McKee et al, 2005). For many the move may be necessitated by a decline in physical and mental health, a reduction in, or even the end of, independence, or the death of a partner. Moving to a care home can therefore have extremely negative connotations. However, with planning and support, crisis-driven admissions can turn into a transition which brings improved quality of life.

Davies and Nolan (2003; 2004) have developed a framework for ensuring the best possible outcome from a move. These are its recommendations.

- Older people should not be put under undue pressure to make decisions on care homes.
- Older people and their relatives need relevant information to enable them to make an informed choice. (The Office of Fair Trading reported in 2005 that 71 per cent of residents surveyed did not remember seeing any booklets or leaflets giving information about care homes.) The 'try it and see' approach, whereby potential residents are able to visit care homes and stay for a period of a few hours, or even a few days, is a useful way in which residents can start to make an informed choice (Kellaher, 2000).
- The decision on the care home should preferably be made jointly between the older person and relatives and carers, with involvement of, and contribution from, health and social care professionals and care-home staff, unless the potential resident or their carer does not want such involvement.

- Older people should be allowed control over decision-making. The Office of Fair Trading (2005) reported that in the majority of cases family were involved in the decision-making process, either solely (37 per cent) or jointly (33 per cent) with the potential resident; only 18 per cent of residents made the decision alone.

*'When I moved into a care home environment I initially experienced confusion, apprehension and upheaval and suffered a complete lack of confidence and, let it be said, a considerable degree of fear – a fear of the unknown, a fear of not knowing what the future will hold, and, quite frankly, of not having any real knowledge about the tenure or, indeed, the rules and requirements of the home.'* James Roemele

Older people and their carers need to feel supported in managing any feelings of guilt, sorrow, loss, grief or anger associated with the change. Relatives are sometimes asked to stay away for the first week or so to allow the person to settle in. This is not good practice (Alzheimer Scotland, 2005), as it denies the important role that the relative plays, with the resident and staff members, during this crucial time. Staff can be inclined to adopt a position of authority, albeit in a very well-meaning way, which can convey to relatives at this highly sensitive time that their services are no longer required. In fact, a relative may require help in redefining his or her relationship with a partner when the partner moves into a care home (Clarke and Bright, 2006).

Overall, the process of entering a care home should be considered as much an opportunity to realise new opportunities and challenges as it is a result of some form of loss of independence or health status.

*'Now that I have spent a year in this home I feel very settled and consider it is a refuge from disturbance in this town and around the world. . . It is easy to converse with a lot of the residents and staff here. My motto now is "just enjoy life."'*  
John Linton

*'I have lived in this residential home for two years . . . I have now rebuilt my life, thanks to the proprietor and staff. I now want to put the past behind me and live in the present and live as active a life as possible.'* Albert Cooper

*'Finally the day came to move [to the care home]. I was ready for the social worker, who was due to come at ten o'clock. But he didn't arrive. I phoned the home and they said they thought there was some mix-up, that I wasn't going to get moved and I said, "What?" I said, "I am all packed." I was in an awful way. My carer had gone and I didn't know what was going on. Finally he [the social worker] arrived at half past one. The social worker came to see me [again]*

### Information resources for transition to a care home

- Help the Aged produces a regularly updated free advice leaflet entitled *Care Homes* which outlines how to find and what to look for in a care home, and discusses care-home fees
- Care home inspection reports
- Elderly Accommodation Counsel's *Care Options Directory* provides a tool to help people seeking care to establish their own priorities, a database of factual information about each UK home, and new qualitative descriptors to help people judge the likely suitability of those homes that are available to them (<http://www.housingcare.org>)
- Alzheimer Scotland (2003) has drawn up an extensive checklist to assist with the process of choosing a home for a person with dementia; it focuses primarily on the practical but also covers personal and cultural aspects.
- A report by Alzheimer Scotland (2005) offers ideas for assisting residents to acclimatise to living in a care home. Guidelines were developed by Oleson and Shadick (1993) cited in Davies (2001, p. 82)
- *Moving to Quality* (Counsel and Care, 1999) provides guidance on what to ask residents when they come into a home.

*shortly after I moved in. He said he would take me up to my house to collect all my stuff. Well, that is the last I have heard or seen of him. The whole thing was very stressful. If things had been explained to me, if they had only phoned to tell me what was what, it would have made all the difference. I could have gone on from there rather than being kept hanging on and making me feel very frustrated.'*  
Margaret Laurenson