

Quick Poll Survey: Life in a Care Home

Introduction

Healthwatch Lincolnshire wanted to hear from residents and/or their family/relatives about life in a care home in 2021. We wanted to gather an insight into care quality, satisfaction, and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We particularly wanted to gain an understanding of the impact on overall care and experience of the ongoing changes in visiting protocols and how this information was communicated with you. To gather this information, we conducted an online survey.

Aim

To understand the complexities and positive outcomes of living in care homes across the county and examine how this has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Methodology

We heard from 59 people via an online and paper survey during November to December 2021.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic we were unable to conduct this research in our preferred way, going into care homes and talking with residents and using paper copies of surveys. Therefore, we had to use an online survey instead.

We heard from
59
people

Findings

Who took part:

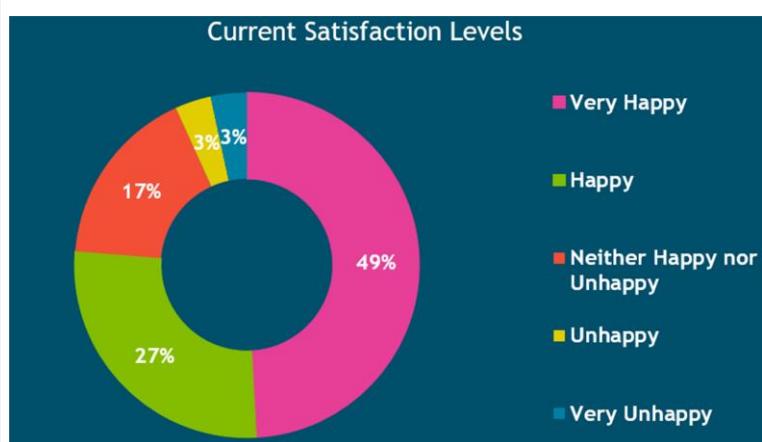
26%	Boston Borough
19%	East Lindsey District
7%	Lincoln City
5%	North Kesteven District
9%	South Holland District
22%	South Kesteven District
7%	West Lindsey District
5%	Out of area



Over half of respondents were family/relatives responding with their views on a care home. Seventeen percent of participants were residents of a care home.

Current Satisfaction

Current overall satisfaction with care homes was the following:



"All the staff have been amazing during the pandemic. When lockdowns were in place they were fantastic at keeping the residents entertained & safe."

"Staffing has deteriorated. Very difficult to talk/get through to relatives in the care home/inconsistency at times regarding covid regulations."

Care quality over the past 12 months



23% Felt care had improved



70% Felt care had stayed constant



7% Felt care had worsened



Impact of COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in many changes in visiting care homes and contacting their residents. Eighty three percent of respondents were informed about their care homes visiting policy.

Access to information relating to visiting care homes and their at home COVID-19 testing requirements was, for 81%, easy to find. In March 2021 the 'named visitor' system was introduced. Again, the majority thought the system worked well with 6% rating it poor or very poor.

95%

could keep in touch
with relatives in a care home



Accessing Other Services

Sometimes external services are needed, not just those provided by the care home. These external services include GPs, Opticians, Dentist, Audiologist and Chiropody. The impact of COVID-19 on the ability to access these services was varied.

This is what you told us:



Access to dentistry was the poorest with 30% having no access



25% had no access to hearing checks



Access to an optician was a mixed bag with some having easy access to services but others had no access



55% either always or mostly had access to chiropody



10% of individuals could not access a GP

Taking a closer look

We also gave you the opportunity to tell us in your own words about your experience with care homes over the past 12 months. The responses were considerably varied. Whilst it was lovely to have so many positive comments and experiences during this time, sadly this was not the case for others.

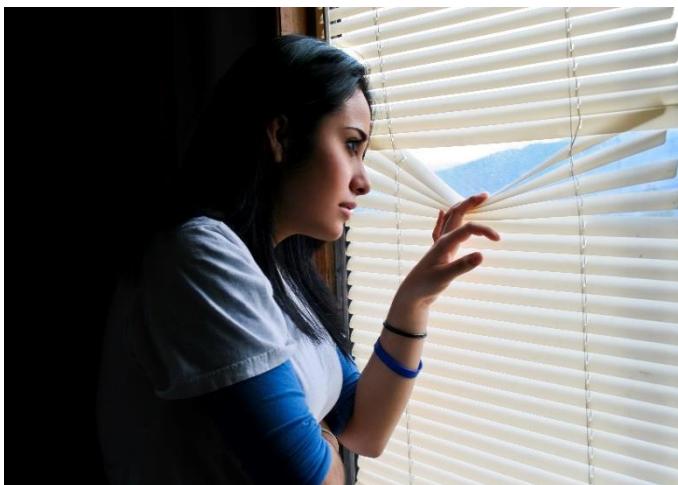


Care now Versus Care prior to the pandemic

The key themes in responses relating to the comparison of care now and prior to the pandemic included the following sentiments:

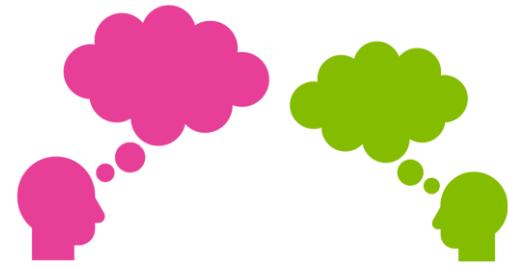
- Staff had done well to adapt to the circumstances
- No change in the level of care
- Lower staffing levels causing concerns over quality of care
- Increase in loneliness due to fewer visits and activities
- Poor communication regarding COVID visiting regulations

Another crucial point raised was the difficulties in communication between residents and staff due to masks being worn.



"The care home has brought in activities such as cinema, added library, additional tabletop games, sorted the garden, purchased exercise equipment, etc."

"From a relatives point of view, when restrictions are in place mum misses the visitors because she interacts with everyone who goes into the home - contractor, me, other visitors/relatives"



Just because someone moves into a care home it does not mean that you stop being a carer.

Many respondents found the transition of themselves or a loved one moving into a care home both emotionally and logically challenging. The latter often due to poor communication. The decline in visiting and communication for all parties has had negative impacts on mental health, which many hope will be resolved when visiting regulations change. For others there was relief that their loved one had a smooth transition into care home life, and they are now thriving.

"I feel empowered to continue being Mums main source of care & support ever since they entered the home in March 2020"

"I am stressed out by worrying how she is not being cared for."

"Difficult not being able to see my father face to face & his mental health has deteriorated a lot not having visitors."

"When moving into the care home, the process was of what will happen isn't very clear."

Additional feedback

Many commented on how especially challenging this pandemic has been for the family, relatives, residents, and carers of those who have Dementia or Alzheimer's disease. They told us that it has been difficult explaining to them about the pandemic and its resulting consequences of reduced visiting and communication, which has had a negative effect on the mental health of all those involved.

Summary

It was pleasing to hear so many positive experiences with care homes in 2021. Overall satisfaction was high with 76% being happy or very happy. The majority felt that the level of care had not changed over the past 12 months, and they could remain in contact with loved ones in a care home. Whilst many thought the ‘named visitor’ system worked well, others did not and information regarding the system was poorly communicated.

Furthermore, despite this positive feedback, there were still many recurring issues of concern. Areas of concern included:

- Reduction in staff levels causing concerns about care quality
- Access to dentistry, audiologists, and opticians
- Poor communication regarding COVID visiting regulations
- Fewer visits and less communication with residents negatively impacting mental health

Communication between all parties appears to be a key area that needs tackling and improving with changes not just in relation to COVID visiting regulations but transitioning into care home life.

Hopefully, some issues such as reduced visiting times and fewer internal and external activities will be resolved when restrictions are eased. However, issues with the number of staff and quality of care remain a constant problem regardless of the pandemic.

This report will be widely shared with care homes across Lincolnshire as well as Lincolnshire County Council and Lincolnshire Care Association as well as the wider public.

Finally, we received so many positive comments and experiences, we wanted to share some more of those with you. Here are a just a few:

“I couldn't wish for a better Home for my mother. The care is amazing and they are always doing something with the residents. They think of everything.”

“All members of staff have been extremely challenged by COVID demands and they have risen to the challenge magnificently. Everything possible has been done and is being done to protect our loved ones.”

“When lockdowns were in place staff were fantastic at keeping the residents entertained & safe.”

“Staff have stepped up and demonstrated such kindness and compassion to ensure residents are cared for and feel loved by the team.”

“Staff have managed to continue to strive magnificently to provide high quality care for some of the most vulnerable people in society”

“Mum is now so much safer and happier. Her mental health improved due to moving from living alone to being in the company of others 24/7.”

“I am very impressed with how the staff and residents welcomed my sister in to their community family. Having to care for a new resident during the Pandemic cannot have been easy for the Care Home, but they have done their utmost to accommodate her as a person with complex needs. I am proud of the way they have communicated with me and made me still feel part of the process.”



Share your thoughts

You can help make health and care services better by sharing your experiences and ideas.

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