

UNISON residential care worker survey and residential care charter executive summary

Background

A UNISON survey of 1,003 residential care workers was carried out between 3 May and 2 June 2017. The findings shine a light on the crisis in the UK's residential care system. They highlight the myriad of problems and challenges facing a sector that is letting down care users and its workforce.

The findings show how care workers are being over-worked, undervalued and routinely exploited, leading to residents being deprived of basic human contact and care.

The report comes as UNISON launches its new residential care charter, which calls for improved standards for both care workers and residents. The charter also aims to restore respect and dignity in the delivery of care throughout the sector.

The results

Just 17% of residential care workers feel that they have enough time to spend with residents without being rushed and compromising their dignity or well-being.

When asked what residents are regularly missing out on because of the lack of time care workers said the following:

- 88% do not have time for a conversation with residents
- 83% can't do nice things with residents, such as take them out of the home
- 66% are not given enough time to complete or update necessary paperwork for care plans
- 56% said they don't have time to cut someone's nails
- 32% don't have time to wash residents' hair
- 29% said they don't have time to wash, bath or shower residents
- 27% said they don't have time to help residents eat and drink
- 27% don't have time to comb and/or style residents' hair
- 26% don't have time to take residents to the toilet
- 25% don't have time for personal care tasks to be completed properly (e.g. stoma care)
- 25% don't have time to notice any deterioration in resident's health.

In the comments section a number of people reported that male residents were going without shaves due to the lack of time. Others commented on the increasingly demanding care needs of people living in residential care which puts more pressure on staff and means they have little time to do anything other than address basic care needs. Care workers are being denied the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships with residents when they are able to talk to them and find out more about them.

The overwhelming reason why care workers feel they don't have enough time to deliver proper care is that there aren't enough staff – 89 per cent of respondents gave this answer. More than a third (36 per cent) said the care needs of the people in the home are too complex for them to meet. One in ten (10 per cent) said the home does not have

the right equipment, and six per cent said they had not been provided with the necessary training to deal with the person's condition.

Quotes from care workers:

"I feel the level of care needs have got higher but staffing levels have stayed the same. It's more like nursing care than residential care and also the paperwork is shocking. It's more about ticking that box than spending quality time with residents."

"Over time our residents' needs have intensified so now everyone requires personal care. It is difficult to keep up."

"I believe the home that I work in has excellent staff with good training. But staff do not have enough time to do all the things they'd like to with residents – like sitting chatting, playing a game of cards or dominoes, or just reading the newspaper with them."

Only 27 per cent of staff said that there are regularly enough staff in their home to provide a good quality level of care to residents. Focusing on night shifts, only 37% said that there are regularly enough staff in their home to provide a safe and good quality level of care to residents.

Analysis from the BBC earlier this year found that around 900 care workers are leaving their jobs every day. In our survey only 37 per cent said that their workforce is stable and that people tended to stay a good while. This puts more pressure on remaining staff and also hampers bonds being formed with residents.

Despite the work being emotionally and physically demanding – with shifts often lasting up to 12 hours – 80 per cent of respondents said they often have to work through their breaks.

When asked if their employer regularly carried out thorough safety checks to ensure the well-being of residents and care staff only 57 per cent said this happened.

The pressure on care home workers is felt in various ways. The survey shows that some employers are forcing staff to ration equipment (26 per cent) such as wheelchairs, wet wipes, gloves, continence pads and hoists.

When asked to detail what their residents were missing, hundreds worryingly said they did not have enough continence pads for their residents. Gloves and wipes were often in short supply. A lack of slide sheets, standing aids, hoists and adjustable beds was also mentioned.

Quotes from care workers:

"There are never enough gloves, aprons, wipes or incontinence pads."

"The allocation of pads is minimal. One resident who is wheelchair bound is only entitled to two pads a day. She will often sit for long hours smelling of urine."

“We have to fight to get pads. Can take weeks to get right equipment in place.”

“We never have enough continence pads which we need to maintain good hygiene levels and dignity.”

Just under half (45 per cent) of respondents said that their residents are able to access a range of good and stimulating activities each day in their home, such as quizzes, exercise classes and massages.

Conclusion

Previous work carried out by UNISON on homecare has illustrated that residential care workers are also being prevented from delivering good quality and dignified care to those who rely on them. Dignity and justice must be at the heart of the care system. Everyone in residential care deserves to be supported and properly looked after – irrespective of wealth, age or disability. For this to happen, care workers must be valued.

UNISON’s residential care charter is a set of standards that were created by residential care workers in order to raise standards. It sets out the minimum standards and employment conditions required to deliver decent care. Employment levels, pay, conditions and training have a direct impact on the quality of care. A more stable, well-equipped workforce is essential to deliver high quality, consistent care.

UNISON urges councils, commissioners and providers in the voluntary and private sector to adopt the residential care charter. UNISON will campaign for decision makers to adopt the charter and continue to call for adequate funding for social care.

The charter can be read in full [here](#).

Residential care survey 2017

Questions and Answers

Question: Are there regularly enough staff in your residential/care/nursing home to provide a good quality level of care to residents?

Yes – 27%

No – 73%

Question: Do you feel you have enough time to spend with residents without being rushed and compromising the dignity or well being of the people you look after?

Yes – 17%

No – 83%

Question: If you don't get enough time to provide the care you'd like to then what are your residents regularly missing out on?

- 88% do not have time for a conversation together
- 83% can't do nice things with residents, such as take them out of the home
- 66% are not given enough time to complete or update necessary paperwork for people's care plans
- 56% said they don't have time to do someone's nails
- 32% don't have time to wash resident's hair
- 29% said they don't have time to wash, bath or shower residents
- 27% said they don't have time to help residents eat and drink
- 27% don't have time to comb and/or style residents hair
- 26% don't have time to take residents to the toilet
- 25% don't have time for personal care tasks to be completed properly (e.g. stoma care)
- 25% don't have time to notice a deterioration in resident's health

Question: Why do you feel you don't have enough time to deliver proper care?

89% - there aren't enough staff

36% - the care needs of residents are too complex for them to meet

10% - the home does not have the right equipment

6% - the employer hasn't provided the necessary training to deal with resident's conditions

Question: Are you given enough time to complete or update necessary paperwork for people's care plans?

Yes - 34%

No - 66%

Question: Does your employer regularly carry out thorough safety checks to ensure the wellbeing of residents and care staff?

Yes - 57%

No - 43%

Question: Does your employer provide you with equipment to meet the needs of your residents? e.g. enough hoists/wheelchairs/continence pads?

Yes - 74%

No - 26%

When asked what residents are missing out on hundreds highlighted that they do not have enough continence pads.

Question: Are residents able to access a range of good and stimulating activities each day in your home? e.g quizzes, exercise classes, massages

Yes - 45%

No - 55%

Question: Have you received specialised training to care for people with the following conditions?

Dementia - 88%

Diabetes - 38 %

Mental health problems - 40%

Neurological conditions - 14%

Physical and learning disabilities - 31%

Sensory loss - 26%

Question: Do you find you often have to work through your breaks?

Yes – 80%

No – 20%

Question: Generally speaking do you have a settled workforce at your home?

Yes, the force is stable and people tend to stay for a good while – 37%

No, we regularly have a lot of new care workers as people don't tend to stay for long – 63%

Question: What type of employer do you work for?

Local council – 17%

A private care provider – 69%

NHS – 0%

A charity or voluntary care company – 11%

Other – 3%