

PE1710/F

Petitioner submission of 3 December 2019

After reading the submissions, I was concerned to read that in some areas of Scotland community hospitals and local authority care homes are still being closed down despite the important role they play in the community.

This position is held by Scottish Government in their response to the petition on October 15th 2019. The view put forward then was that 'care is being provided in outmoded physical care environments'. This comment was made in regard to dementia care within residential context. Given the complex issues regarding dementia, residential care is important as in the advanced stages some sufferers can be quite violent and difficult to handle.

Another Scottish Government document launched in June 2019 refers to a substantial change in the operation of residential care homes run by the NHS and Care Homes operated by local authorities. The view is maintained that there is not the need for long stay care in either institution and that the stay should be as short as possible in order to send the patients home with a care package. The purpose of this is to save money as it is widely recognized both by the Scottish Government and Local Authorities that both community hospitals and care homes are costly to run.

The provision of money for social care integration does not enable local authorities to offer their own care homes as is recognized in the response from the city of Aberdeen to the petition. The City of Aberdeen does not run its own care homes on grounds of cost and availability of staff. It also admits that there are not enough private care homes to meet the demand for places.

Aberdeenshire itself admits that it only caters for 17% of those elderly people requiring some form of residential care which is worrying as the predominance of private nursing homes means pressure on Social Care budgets.

It is this pressure on Social Care budgets which has resulted in some care companies cutting back such as the Bield which used to run a Care Home in Biggar in South Lanarkshire. The people from this place were redistributed to McClymont house run by South Lanarkshire Council as well as homes within the private sector such as Beechgrove near Lanark.

The Scottish Government in its response has dwelt yet again on the fact that people want care to come to them in their home or to be taken care of at home. One of the principal reasons why this petition has been promulgated is that home care may work in some instances but there are many reasons why it does not.

In South Lanarkshire medical care within the home is, for example, not available south of the community of Law so basically this service is not available to the rural community of Clydesdale. There are insufficient NHS staff to provide this service in tandem with Social Work.

Much is made of the advantages of Social Work being in the position to provide tailor made packages, however the truth is that often these are not provided as quickly as they should be and the time that care workers can spend in the homes of the clients is really very limited. This is a major problem if the care is Elderly. An example of this which was brought to my attention a fortnight ago was an 88 year old woman having to look after her husband of 89. This is not an unusual scenario.

The responses do not really stress the financial problems which Social Care Departments face. South Lanarkshire in 2016 when I was a Councillor had an overspend of one million pounds. Such a situation will not be unusual for a Social Work Department facing the problem of dealing with the challenges of an ageing population.

Much of overspends is not necessarily Care Homes but the use of Private Care companies which is costly. Not only is this more costly than keeping people in Care Homes but Private Care company workers are often demotivated and poorly paid. This runs counter to the aspiration of the Scottish Government to deliver better health and wellbeing outcomes. Indeed the cuts to both NHS and Local Government Services have unfortunately led to a lower life expectancy in Scotland. The poorer parts of Glasgow have the life expectancy of a third world country and this should be a wake up call for those in Government.

Overall there needs to be a reappraisal of the current strategy as it is not working despite the noble aspirations typified by NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde's Moving Forward Together Programme. This programme lays out a bold plan to provide world class hospital services as well as empowering people to improve their own health. Unfortunately these things are not happening particularly the aspiration to empower people to take care of their conditions. Frankly this is not possible and there is some acknowledgment that community hospitals and care homes are vital within the Community. Indeed Councils such as Perth and Angus do see the importance of the role of cottage hospitals and care homes.

Finally there must be a continued investment both in care homes and cottage hospitals within the public sector. The indications are that the public value health above everything else but there is a feeling that the changes in the NHS and Social Care are driven by financial pressures. Some of these changes are useful but unfortunately there is neither the staff nor the resources to see the improvements take place.