



The Regulation and
Quality Improvement
Authority



Health and Social
Services Councils
of Northern Ireland

P R E S S R E L E A S E

12 June 2008

ARE YOU BEING HEARD?

Older people living in care homes are often unaware of advocacy services that could help them make their voice heard, according to a newly published report. Advocacy which is a process of influencing people to create change is particularly relevant for those who are vulnerable in some way, for example older infirm people.

'Are you being heard? A review of advocacy services for older people in care homes in Northern Ireland' was produced jointly by the Health and Social Services Councils (HSSCs) and the Regulation Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) to assess the availability of services and the barriers to accessing them.

Stella Cunningham, Chief Officer of the Southern Health & Social Services Council speaking at the launch of the report said, *"Whilst advocacy is available from a number of sources including care home staff as well as health and social care staff, we believed that independent advocacy was not available across the region and wanted to explore what this meant for care home residents and their relatives. The extent to which advocacy was promoted and provided within care home settings and the existence of any common quality standards were also areas that we investigated. We*

believe that the evidence gathered within the report will encourage a more strategic approach to the development of advocacy services."

The audit collected information from 230 care homes across Northern Ireland, residents of care homes, their relatives and a range of people in the community involved in providing independent advocacy to older people. The report makes 7 recommendations for improving access to independent advocacy services. These range from the suggestion of a shared definition of advocacy to the use of the RQIA inspection process to ensure that service users have access to independent advocacy services.

Theresa Nixon, RQIA Director of Quality Assurance concluded: *"The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority believes that to improve care services for older people in care homes, a listening partnership in which the residents are the key contributors is essential. Advocates - whether employees within the care setting, or an independent advocacy service - should support older people in care homes to enable them to be heard. RQIA supports the call for these services to work within a set of core standards that can be monitored to ensure a consistent approach across Northern Ireland."*

Copies of the report are available by contacting the Southern Health & Social Services Council on Tel: 028 3834 9900. Alternatively, the report can be downloaded from the following websites:

NHSSC – www.nhssc.org

WHSSC – www.whssc.org

SHSSC – www.shsscouncil.net

RQIA – www.rqia.org.uk

EHSSC – www.ehssc.org

Ends

Notes to Editors

- Health and Social Services Councils were set up in 1991 to represent the views of patients and users of the health and social services. Council members are made up of 40% of whom are nominated by District Councils in each Area. The remainder are appointed by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety – 30% voluntary/community representatives and 30% are nominees with an interest in health and social care.
- Health and Social Services Councils have a right to be consulted by Health and Social Services Boards about and plans for development of services, or where significant changes are being considered. Councils play an important part in representing the views of consumers of services to the decision makers, and provide advice and support to patients and service users in relation to complaints procedures.

If you require any further information please contact :

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The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority, established in April 2005 under The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, is the independent health and social care regulatory body for Northern Ireland. In its work RQIA encourages continuous improvement in the quality and availability of health and social care services through a programme of inspections and reviews.

The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003, under which RQIA was set up, also places a statutory duty of quality upon HPSS organisations and requires the DHSSPS to develop standards against which the quality of services can be measured.

RQIA's main functions are:

- to inspect the quality of health and social care services provided by Health and Social Care (HSC) boards, trusts and agencies in Northern Ireland. These inspections take the form of reviews of clinical and social care governance arrangements within HSC bodies; and,
- to regulate (i.e. register and inspect) a wide range of health and social care services delivered by HSC bodies and the independent sector. The regulation of services aims to ensure that service users know what quality of services they can expect to receive and service providers have a benchmark against which to measure their quality.

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