

Age Alliance Wales Senedd Presentation 15th January 2013

For many older people later life brings enormous satisfaction. With enough money and plentiful leisure time, older people can pursue their dreams and make the life choices that bring them joy and fulfilment.

For some older people in Wales their experience of health and social care is fantastic, they are supported to live effectively in their community in the way that they choose. They are supported to get out and about to the extent that they would want and they get the help at home they feel they need.

But too many do not get the health and social care services they need and too many are treated with a lack of dignity and respect.

It is widely acknowledged that the existing arrangements for providing care in Wales are struggling under increasing pressure and a lack of resources.

Age Alliance Wales believes that older people must have access to the information, support and services they need to maintain their independence and wellbeing, including the reablement support they may need to regain their quality of life following a period of illness or a stay in hospital.

The start point is information. Easy access to relevant information on available services is crucial if older people are to receive the support they actually need and want.

Age Alliance Wales believes that the duty placed on statutory bodies to cooperate in provision of information services needs to be strengthened. The NHS and social services must provide relevant information on the support available for older people who are being discharged from hospital or receiving social care support, to help them to return to a safe, secure and, where appropriate, supported home environment.

But we should go further. Age Alliance Wales wants to see duties on information, and on advice and on advocacy. Advocacy is crucial to empower and support people to have their voices heard, to navigate their way through the system, and to make informed choices.

We believe that there must be a commitment to improving the provision of independent advocacy services across Wales in order to achieve “a stronger voice and real control” for individuals.

And support and solutions should be based on individual need and not on what services are most readily available.

A single care assessment is needed, an assessment that is person centred and outcome focussed. The assessment should be a citizen led process ensuring that older people are fully involved in decisions about their care. They should be listened to and responded to in a positive manner, and good communication should be a priority at all times with people not feeling patronised or ignored.

It's about basic dignity - yet it would appear that collectively we still haven't found what it takes to maintain dignity when providing care and services - and in particular, when we are talking about providing care or services for older or vulnerable people.

Dignity articulates a minimum expectation of how we should be treated. It resonates and means something to all of us; I am sure that in this room we would all maintain that dignity is fundamental to good care.

It is unfortunate, but true, that years of investment in health (and to a lesser degree social care), legislation on human rights, numerous campaigns and awareness raising have not been translated into the significant improvements that are vital in the experience of those who use the services most.

As Age Alliance Wales we believe dignity and respect must be seen as a fundamental element of care, and we must not allow the current public spending climate to be used as an excuse for not acting.

Failure to ensure that people are receiving the support they need leads to an increased risk of admission or readmission to hospital or care, and to dependence – it can be catastrophic for the individual, and it is a price that society should not be prepared to pay.

And too often people are not made aware of services available from third sector organisations that can support them to live independently in their

own home or provide activities that promote wellbeing. The third sector plays a crucial role in health and social care in Wales with over 6,000 organisations involved in health and social services. Between them these organisations provide advocacy; advice services; health services; family welfare; physical disabilities; learning disabilities; counselling; carers; older people; mental health; general health and wellbeing; specific health conditions; emergency relief; and self help.

The sector already provides public services across health and social care, but there is scope for public bodies to work much more imaginatively with the sector to develop services that are closer to citizens and more responsive to their needs, and which add real value by drawing on community resources.

Local government spends only 3% and NHS funding only 0.3% of their budget in supporting the third sector. Yet uniquely, the third sector almost always adds direct cash value to any funding it receives from the public sector, drawing in funding from additional sources. Research carried out by WCVA on behalf of the Welsh Assembly Government in 2007 mapped the health, social care and well-being services provided by third sector organisations in Wales. This found that for every £1 of government funding the third sector secured over an extra £1 from other sources. The figure today is thought to be even higher.

Care & Repair research has shown that every £1 spent on preventative and reablement services can save the NHS £7.50.

And of course the third sector also adds a huge amount of direct value in kind through volunteer effort.

The third sector has been at the forefront of developing and providing preventative services. Early intervention and preventative care services help to maintain health and well-being, however policy on prevention is still not matched by resource allocation. Reablement services, helping people to do things for themselves, reduce the need for longer term social care and unnecessary hospital admissions.

And whilst it is known that preventative approaches and reablement services can be cost effective, there appears to be little enthusiasm or support for them from local government or the NHS. In fact pressure on

resources in many local authority areas inevitably means them waiting until people are at, or near, crisis point before intervening. As a result, the health and wellbeing of older people, their families and carers can be put at risk.

We believe that the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Bill provides an historic opportunity for Wales to make a real commitment to a strategic approach to maintaining health and wellbeing; to clearly establish people's rights and entitlements to care services and to make essential improvements to how services are delivered. And Phase 3 of the Strategy for Older People provides an opportunity to create an outcome focussed action plan that really delivers for older people locally and nationally.

Age Alliance Wales and the Welsh Reablement Alliance will be working hard to ensure that the Bill, the Strategy for Older People and other national and local government policies and strategies include clear and unambiguous commitments to ensure that older people are treated with dignity, that support preventative and reablement services, that ensure that older people are involved and listened to in agreeing packages of care and that they get the services that they want, need and deserve.

Thanks to Mark Drakeford for hosting today's event and to the other AMs who have attended and supported us today. Special thanks to Mr Pritchard for being prepared to share his experiences with us, and thanks to all of you for being here today and supporting Age Alliance Wales and the Welsh Reablement Alliance.