

Relationship between staff and quality of care in care homes: StaRQ mixed methods study

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Plain language summary

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Plain language summary

This study was about the relationship between staffing and quality in care homes.

Almost half a million older people live in care homes in England. Why quality of care and quality of life for residents vary so much between and within homes is unknown, but staff and the ways they work are likely to be important. Researching staffing and quality is difficult: quality means different things to different people and a lot of things shape how quality feels to residents, families and staff. In the past, researchers have oversimplified the problem to study it and may have missed important influences.

We took a more complex view. In five interlinked work packages, we collected and analysed: (1) research journal articles; (2) national data from different care homes; (3) data from a large care organisation to look at what it is about staffing that influences quality; (4) reports and ratings of homes from the Care Quality Commission; and (5) we looked at the networks between staff in homes that shape how quality improvement techniques might spread. We used theories about how our findings might be linked to plan for this data collection and analysis. The results were combined into something called a 'logic model' – a diagram and explanation that make it easier for managers, researchers and people interested in care homes to see how staffing influences quality.

Staffing considerations that might improve quality include: not swapping managers too much; having sufficient and consistent staff for family-like relationships in homes and putting residents' needs first; supporting staff and giving them freedom to act; and key staff leading by example. Research examining care home quality should capture those aspects that mean the most to residents, their families and staff.

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