



Written by
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Forging links with care homes

- Allow time to establish ministry
- Understand care homes
- Build relationships with staff
- Offer support that meets residents' needs
- Agree processes for raising concerns

Background

Spiritual care for older people in care homes is an important aspect of Anna Chaplaincy ministry and church pastoral care. Undertaking this ministry requires teams to work in partnership with care home management and staff. In some situations there are established relationships with care home management and staff, and these are a useful starting point. In other instances a relationship has to be started with no prior links. In either situation it is helpful to consider the following points as you establish this ministry among older people, some of whom will be living with dementia.

1 Allow time for the relationships to develop and the ministry to be established

Building relationships with care home managers and staff takes time, in order to get to know them, and for them to get to know you, so that mutual trust develops. Think about the timing of involvement of pastoral team members, Anna Chaplain(s), Anna Friends or other church volunteers. Take time to introduce people and their role, so relationships can be established with staff and residents.

2 Understand care homes, their place in the health and social care system and what each care home seeks to offer by way of care

Understanding how a care home operates and its place in the health and social care system is helpful for being able to support staff. Nursing homes and residential care homes have different staffing

requirements, for instance. Different ownership models may affect how care homes are resourced. Find out more about the care home you are visiting – read its literature and website material, as this may provide a way to offer appropriate support for them. See resources below.

3 Establish relationships with the manager, activities coordinator, then other staff, residents and family

In seeking to forge a link with a care home, it is helpful initially to meet the manager and activities coordinator together, to explain what your church can offer for residents, staff and families, be that through Anna Chaplaincy ministry or regular visits from clergy and pastoral team members. You can also explore expectations from both sides and the process of how you will exercise your ministry there – what will be offered and at roughly what times. It may be helpful to draw up an agreement that states what is expected on both sides and what support the home will give as a professional way to establish a good relationship with the care home. This agreement can then be reviewed at regular intervals.

4 Maintain relationships through commitment and presence

Ease your way in, by showing commitment and consistency of presence. Maintain regular contact with the manager and activities coordinator. If a relationship already exists, reviewing the ministry with them on a periodic basis is also helpful. To ensure everyone's safety, regularly check the care home's infection control policy and make sure all the team are aware of the necessary requirements.

5 Offer services and activities which meet the needs of residents and staff, not just what you would like to do

Offering services and group activities such as Messy Vintage is often the way into a care home. The development of these should reflect the needs of residents and staff, in terms of frequency, format and focus. Some churches and Anna Chaplains offer one-to-one contact and befriending of individual residents, especially where residents are room-bound or have no other visitors, sometimes offering these residents Holy Communion in their room. Praying with residents nearing the end of their lives and supporting families at this time is welcomed. New activities may require further volunteer support – again ensure new volunteers are inducted appropriately to do this work. As new Anna Friends or other volunteers are introduced, ask the care home to offer an induction programme. A risk assessment for activities needs to be undertaken.

6 Processes to address poor practice and other concerns need to be considered at the start of every engagement with a care home

Ideally, the Anna Chaplaincy or church pastoral team visiting a care home will have agreed protocols with management, with ground rules in place should problems arise (e.g. if bad practice is observed or if staff or residents identify areas of concern). Care home safeguarding processes need to be understood by members of the team visiting. A process of feedback to the care home management should be agreed.

Further resources:

ENRICH is a resource developed by and for the research community working with care homes, introducing their place in the health and social care system –
enrich.nihr.ac.uk/research-community/#understanding-care-homes

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