

Sally Knocker describes a person-centred model of dementia care that breaks down traditional notions of nursing homes



Home from home

A model of care being adopted in nursing homes across the UK and Ireland is casting aside the old institutional image in favour of providing what residents living with dementia really want from life.

The person-centred model, known as a Butterfly Service, has been developed by the consultancy Dementia Care Matters over the past 18 years.

SUMMARY

The Butterfly Service model of dementia care devised by consultancy Dementia Care Matters starts from the premise that 'feelings matter most'. It challenges traditional ideas of what a good nursing home offers and breaks down the divide between staff and people living in the home.

Author

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So far 43 nursing homes have achieved Butterfly Service status, which requires undertaking a one-year strategic project that demonstrates a holistic approach to improving the culture of care (see box).

Organisations are encouraged to remove all 'us' and 'them' divisions in the care settings, starting with uniforms, separate staff toilets and 'staff only' signs on doors.

Most of those nurses who have given up their uniforms as part of the project have reported that it has made a profound change in their relationships with people living in the home.

Zippy Magana, a nurse at the Coxwell Hall home in Faringdon, Oxfordshire, explains: 'What we are doing is taking away the "I" as a nurse

and moving to the "we" as a family. People living here do not relate to you as a nurse, more as a friend or relative.'

Anita Astle, managing director of Wren Hall in Nottingham, emphasises that people are living at home, rather than as guests in a hotel or patients in a hospital. 'In my home I feel comfortable, relaxed and safe. I take risks that I decide are worth taking. Sadly, I have worked alongside too many staff who seem to need to control others and want to use their power to dictate.'

For Ms Astle, the most important part of the Butterfly approach is that 'it shifts the balance of power by removing controlling care. It enables nurses and others to become care partners.'



Putting people first: residents and staff at homes that have adopted the Butterfly Service model of care

The next step of the Butterfly process is for staff to think about all the practices that make the institution feel less like a person's home, such as placing a medicine trolley in the middle of the dining room at lunchtime, using large metal pots for pouring tea and serving meals that arrive already plated up.

The culture shift also involves seeing things from the perspective of the person living with dementia and learning a new language of feelings. Jean Gungeram, a nurse at The Royal Star and Garter Homes, says: 'We used to take things literally, but now the focus is on interpreting.

'For example when someone says: "Where is my mother?", they might be trying to say that they are lonely or need some comfort or company.'

On starting work at Butterfly Service homes many nurses describe a sense of 'coming home' and instinctively feel that this is how they want to relate to people.

Relationships between colleagues also tend to improve because nurses move away from their computers and spend more time working alongside care workers. A 'showing not telling' approach to staff management is another vital ingredient of success.

Tactile environment

A Butterfly Service home is designed to be a colourful and stimulating environment that offers people living with dementia lots to engage them. People who are mobile and active need to have things on the walls and on hand rails that can easily be touched and picked up.

For those in the latter stages of dementia, objects need to be closer to hand – on a small table or even on the ceiling for someone who is in bed looking upwards.

Where possible, individuals should have opportunities to spend time in a garden, enjoying natural light, colours and sounds. Indoors, chocolate fountains, musical instruments, and staff wearing colourful hats or scarves and blowing bubbles all help to create magic moments.

It is important to talk to relatives about the 'feelings matter most' philosophy, and why the staff approaches and physical environment are changing so fundamentally. Most will soon see the benefits for their loved one

of living in a much more relaxed and home-like environment, but some will still prefer a more formal care environment.

Ms Astle has started to quantify the effects of the Butterfly Service model at her care home in terms of several key measures, including reduced incidence of falls (from 97 in the previous year to 42 post implementation), and reduced incidence of 'challenging behaviours' (from 116 in the previous six months to 67 in the most recent six-month period).

Less quantifiable, but equally relevant, she describes much more 'laughter and fun' between people living and working in the home.

The day-long observational audits carried out in the homes that have adopted the service suggest that when all the changes are in place, people with dementia are able to live more fulfilled and active lives.

Individual stories also speak volumes, as Ms Magana reveals: 'When Frances first came to us she had lost a lot of weight and often laid down on the floor. Through developing her trust, she is now concerned about her appearance again, has a strong sense of humour and gives speeches at all our functions. At her review meeting recently, she said: "We have a lot of laughter. This is a home away from home"' NS

How the Butterfly care homes get their wings

Nursing home organisations hoping to achieve Butterfly Service status must undertake a one-year project that will typically include:

- ▶ An initial qualitative observational baseline audit.
- ▶ A management strategy day to scope the year's work.
- ▶ One day to undertake an environmental review.
- ▶ Twelve days consultancy – one day per month.
- ▶ A nurse and/or team leader modelling project – six days (one day per month).
- ▶ A workshop training programme for 15 participants.
- ▶ An unannounced kitemark audit.

For more information about Dementia Care Matters visit www.dementiacarematters.com or telephone 01273 242335