



The Regulation and
Quality Improvement
Authority



Health and Social
Services Councils
of Northern Ireland

Press Release

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WHO'S ADVOCATING FOR OLDER PEOPLE IN CARE HOMES?

Advocacy for older people in residential and nursing homes was under the spotlight recently at a seminar jointly organised by the Health & Social Services Councils (HSSCs) and the Regulation, Quality and Improvement Authority (RQIA).

The seminar brought together over 100 people involved in all aspects of service delivery, planning and regulation for residential services for older people to hear the results of an audit carried out by the HSSCs and RQIA. The audit included a questionnaire completed by 39% of homes within Northern Ireland, the views of stakeholders (including churches, the voluntary sector, politicians), as well as hearing from residents of homes and their relatives.

Stella Cunningham, speaking on behalf of the HSSCs said, "The audit, which grew out of an Office of Fair Trading market study, was designed to gauge to what extent advocacy services are available for older people in residential or nursing care. The seminar provided an opportunity for those involved in the sector to add their experience to the audit findings. The seminar developed a number of recommendations, which will be incorporated into a final report to be launched in the autumn."

Participants at the seminar heard that 80% of care homes responding provided advocacy services, with 17% providing advocacy training, usually as part of staff induction. They learned that that information was provided through their own staff, the patient and resident guide, and also via residents' and relatives' meetings.

The stakeholder view suggested that an independent element to advocacy services was important but that this required close partnership with service providers. The importance of training and supporting residents to speak for themselves was also highlighted.

Relatives suggested a number of practical ways to promote advocacy such as establishing relatives groups, monthly advocacy clinics in the home and printed information packs.

Residents themselves valued the advocacy support they received from staff and relatives. They identified a number of ways in which they received advocacy such as through keyworker, information and meetings. They felt that it could help them in choosing the right home, getting increased satisfaction and being more independent.

RQIA Inspector, Lorraine Wilson concluded, "The case for strong advocacy has been well made, and it is essential that we have arrangements in place for supporting, listening and hearing what older people say about issues affecting their lives".

Lorraine also thanked everyone who had attended and participated in such an important discussion.

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Notes to Editors:

- **The Southern Health and Social Services Council is one of 4 Health and Social Services Councils set up in 1991 to represent the views of patients and users of the health and social services. The Council has a total of 24 members, 40% of whom are nominated by District Councils in the Southern 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.**

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) was established in April 2005 under The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003. It has responsibility for the monitoring, regulation and reporting of the quality of care and services. Its role is to ensure that health and social care services in Northern Ireland are accessible, well managed and meet the required standards. The Authority will work to ensure that there is openness, clarity and accountability in the management and delivery of all these services.

Advocacy is defined in the dictionary as 'one who argues or defends the cause of another, a supporter, to plead in favour of'.