

It is now over ten years since the transfer of the responsibility for the funding of care home fees was transferred to local authorities. Increasingly their budgets are coming under pressure from older people who entered care homes independently several years ago, were self funding and now find themselves running out of money and eligible for State funding. **This demand apart from being unpredictable also brings with it difficulties for all involved.** Families find themselves in the precarious situation of, having taken responsibility for care home contracts for full fees, being unable to meet the commitment. The result is distress and disharmony between social services, the care provider and the family. At the centre of all this is a vulnerable older person ending their days in a situation that can hardly be described as dignified.

Recognising this problem many social services departments are working in partnership with NHFA either directly or through Help the Aged Care Fees Advisory Services. The aim is to provide older people who are self-funding their care appropriate advice, information and guidance on the financial and legal considerations to be made in relation to their long-term care. Totally independent this encompasses local authority charging and assessment procedures, health authority responsibilities, welfare benefit entitlement, legal matters and, most significantly to all involved, an assessment of the affordability of chosen care.

The NHFA considers that best practice when placing older people in care homes should include a financial assessment on affordability and advice on how best to meet care costs over the long-term. The latter can be achieved. Through the provision of specialist financial advice the high income an individual requires for meeting care costs can often be attained by using just part of their capital thus effectively capping the cost of their care. NHFA provides families with a free care funding assessment report, which, by taking an actuarial view of life expectancy can identify if there is going to be a future funding problem that needs to be addressed at the outset. For example has the resident chosen accommodation appropriate for their assessed needs and if the care home is more expensive than the authorities standard charge will the care provider continue to provide it at that reduced rate.

In an ideal world, local authorities, care providers and families would address these problems on placement enabling the local authorities to record their potential future liabilities.

There are many other issues that need to be addressed with independent advice. In particular, maximising income from both means tested and non-means tested welfare benefits, RNCC assessments, whether the deferred loan scheme is appropriate or in fact would the older person be financially disadvantaged in taking this route. (Comparisons made by NHFA demonstrate that over care periods of three and five years and beyond individuals could be substantially better off by selling their homes and using the proceeds to fund their care)

Social services care managers are carers not accountants but they are expected to understand the complexities of local authority charging procedures, benefits and care home contracts when advising families. Much of this burden can be lifted and many of the problems in dealing with vulnerable older people who are self-funding can be overcome through sensible negotiation; this is where many authorities have identified working in partnership with the NHFA provides a solution.

All involved benefit,

Older people retain their independence and dignity by receiving the care of their choice for as long as they need it without feeling a burden on the home, the local authority or their families. NHFA firmly believes that financial security is an essential factor in providing older people with a feeling of independence dignity and well-being.

The family as a whole benefit from the peace of mind achieved from receiving appropriate legal and financial advice. They are comforted with the knowledge that their loved one's are able to remain in their chosen accommodation, not have to rely on State funding and, as a bonus, are likely to leave an inheritance.

Care providers benefit by continuing to receive full fees for the duration of a resident's stay and not ever being in the position where they have to either move the resident to a smaller room or insist on the family trying to make up a shortfall. Receiving a full fee is for most care providers a priority, particularly if they are to maintain or improve the quality of care standards.

Social services benefit if residents are unlikely to run out of money and become their funding responsibility. Their limited resources can then be used to provide placements and deliver more care for the most needy of cases that must rely on SSD funding.

Health Authorities benefit from a reduction in delayed discharges as a direct result of local authorities having more funding available to implement care packages in a timely manner. Their patient's health is likely to benefit by receiving care in an environment that would be far more suitable for their assessed

needs, rather than having to suffer the inappropriateness of a bed blocking delay, caused by a funding shortage.

The method NHFA has adopted in working with social services normally begins with a training and presentation workshop to care managers together with care providers at the same time if appropriate. This includes what the NHFA considers to be best practice in placing older people in care homes, some of the DWP benefit and financial and legal issues that need to be addressed and how appropriate financial advice can make a difference. One of the difficulties for social services in the past has been in recommending clients to a private sector service. This has been overcome because NHFA makes available **free advice; information and guidance to all regardless of means** and families are never under any obligation to implement any of their recommendations.

NHFA provides leaflets, long term care guides and a range of information sheets for service users. NHFA or Help the Aged Care Fees Advisory Services are easily accessible by post, through their Nation-wide team of advisers, care advice lines or web site www.nhfa.co.uk. NHFA Care Development Manager – Diana Roberts can be contacted on:

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