

There recently  
opened a café  
situated in the

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There are approximately 410,000 elderly people in residential and nursing homes across the UK according to the Department of Health. Nursing homes were developed during the late 19th century while Thatcher was in power and the conservative government acknowledged that they had to provide care for those who needed it; especially those who were poor. Over the years, the number and condition of these homes improved drastically.

Towards the end of the 20th century, England and Wales had a number of 3335 residential homes accommodating 110,767 people with 86% of these being elderly according to Townsend. With life expectancy improving constantly, this number will continue to rise. Care homes have been a good invention over the years but they do; however, come with a number of both benefits and drawbacks leading to the ultimate question of 'are they the best choice of care for the elderly'? When a person moves into a care home, they may feel like they have lost their friends, family and those they are used to seeing on a daily basis. Many older people are admitted to a care home for end of life care. Many care homes wish for their residents to be happy in the last chapter of their life and help to do this by keeping their social life active. Health and Social care provider-Evolving Care, make it their priority to provide companionship.

They accompany the residents on trips, holidays and daily outings as well as encouraging them to participate in hobbies and crafts with other residents. Christchurch care home in Bournemouth recently opened a café situated in the home for both residents, their friends and family and local people. With the use of designs and pictures from the village, the residents were able to stay connected to the local community and interact with people they knew

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and recognised. In addition; in 2014, the care quality commission(CQC) began to inspect how well care homes were creating an environment to make the resident feel at home. Residents with dementia, which many of them have, definitely struggle in an environment that is not familiar to them. Care company Anchor, encourage residents to bring their personal items with them to make them feel more settled. According to the dementia centre at Stirling University, some care homes have even allowed the residents to paint their own bedroom doors so they feel the place is their property. With CQC reports each year, care home staff are making sure that their institutions are a relaxing and comfortable environment for the residents.

Care homes also need to make sure that the residents' nutritional needs are being met. The British Association for Parenteral and Enteral Nutrition (Bapen), stated that 30% of the elderly who are admitted are either at risk of malnutrition or are obese. By following the Food Standards Agency guide on 'Food Served to Older People in Residential Care' which contains menu examples and advice on special requirements, it is possible for care homes to keep these health risks under control.

A care home in Wimbledon has been named the 'academy of nutrition' as a result of responding to what the residents are wanting while maintaining a good quality. 96% of the residents and their families see their catering service as highly favourable. Due to their standard of food, the residents' GP has rarely had to prescribe food supplements. If all care homes can get to this high standard care homes will most likely be the best option of care. On the other hand, although care homes do provide more benefits such as

safety, supervision and erasing the need for the resident to upkeep household bills, there have been a few cases when care homes standards have declined and residents have suffered. In the past couple of years, the CQC found 11 care homes in England to be inadequate and 9 to have low or worrying staffing levels. According to Merrifield, due to shortage of money, no agency staff could be hired at a home in Dudley, which ultimately led to the same staff working long hours several days in a row. This is dangerous for the residents as the staff are more likely to make a mistake when tired.

Low staff numbers have also led to medication being prescribed and administered incorrectly, therefore becoming ineffective. At Harmony House in Nuneaton, staff did not have time to check if medicines were in stock resulting in one resident missing 8 doses of their medicine as the care home did not have it. This shows that care home staff could actually contribute to the decline of a resident's health. Moreover, moving an older person into a care home can have a huge psychological impact on the elderly. With the confusion, loss of independence and the realisation that this step is the end of their road in life; it is a very distressing time for them.

Sollito tells us that 40% of residents in care homes are likely to suffer from depression due to a huge life change and lack of socialising and stimulation. Some care homes prepare therapy for the resident but a lot of them won't go without their family which isn't always possible according to Dr. Sakauye told Aging Care. Home care, an alternative care option, allows the elderly to stay in their home and in an environment they are used to which could have less of a negative impact on their mental health.

Caregivers are also able to spend as much time with the resident as they need; whereas low staffing levels in care homes, result in a lot of the residents being left alone for large amount of time. Family can also feel guilty about shipping their relatives off to a care home; care homes have specific visiting hours which family members may find difficult to fit in with their lives. Fortunately, home care allows them to see their relative at any time. It is clear here that other methods of care can be more beneficial. In 2016, the cost of care home rooms is now more than £30, 000 a year according to Ruddick.

Figures have shown that the average pensioner's income would struggle to cover even 6 months of care. Prestige Nursing and Care state that the cost of care homes has risen by 5. 2% in the last year. This highlights the financial crisis in the care home industry. Britain's biggest care home group, Four Season's Health Care have ended up in £500 million of debt. Although many are trying to combat the crisis the majority are not coping and have resulted in closure. This current situation makes care homes an unreliable care option for the elderly. Bad treatment in care homes has been a problem over the recent years with one case putting the reputation of care homes in a very bad light.

Southern Cross Healthcare, the largest provider of care homes and long term care in the UK were forced to close one of their care homes, Orchid View, after some staff were arrested on suspicion of ill treatment and neglect of residents. The coroner's ruling in 2013 found that a number of the resident's deaths were unexplained and the home was mismanaged and understaffed.

With the risk of these events happening, elderly may not be entirely safe and should choose an alternative option of care. In conclusion, although there are many benefits of care homes, there is evidence of bad mistreatment along with social and mental issues which may affect the elderly.

Therefore, without doubt; an alternative method of care such as home care in which less impact will be made on their mental and social health due to one to one time and the option to stay in familiar surroundings could definitely be more beneficial for the elderly and their families.