

Dying woman's family barred from care home visits

Investigation finds care home was wrong to prevent dying woman's family from tending to her during her final days.

A woman whose mother died in a care home during the Covid 19 pandemic complained that she and her family were not allowed to visit her until the final hours of her life. She told us this was hard to understand and difficult to come to terms with.

The woman's mother was admitted to Clandeboye Care Home, Bangor in October 2020. She was admitted to hospital shortly after, but then returned to the home the following week. She sadly passed away in November 2020.

The woman complained to us about the overall treatment her mother received in the home, saying that it failed to consult with her family on a care plan, and that it did not carry out regular checks to find out if she was in any pain. She believed that the poor quality of care her mother received in the home added to her distress and discomfort in her final days.

As part of our investigation we consulted with an independent consultant nurse with over twenty years' experience in hospitals, care homes and community care.

In relation to the woman's claims that the home failed to create a proper care plan, the home said that in normal circumstances the family would be encouraged to participate in the writing of care plans. However, it acknowledged that because of the pandemic, communication with the resident's family was not as good as it should have been.

We recognised that the Covid 19 pandemic was a difficult time for all health care sectors in Northern Ireland, and particularly for care homes. Nevertheless we believed that it still should have been possible to communicate with the family to help them create the appropriate care plans to help make the resident more comfortable.

We also found that despite the resident being in the home for two weeks, she only received one formal pain assessment. This meant that there may have been times when she was in pain but did not receive the appropriate relief.

We were critical of both failings, which we believed left the family questioning whether their mother received the right care and treatment in the home, and whether her final days could have been made more peaceful.

In relation to whether the family should have been allowed to visit in what proved to be the resident's final week, the home explained that it was experiencing an outbreak of Covid 19 at the time and was following guidelines which only permitted visitors in exceptional circumstances. It said that the resident was not perceived as 'end of life'.

However, our investigation found that when the resident returned to the home after the spell in hospital, it recorded her as needing end of life care. As these were clearly exceptional circumstances, we concluded that the home's actions were not appropriate. Although the family were allowed to be at their mother's bedside on the day she died, the home created a very distressing situation and prevented the resident from having her family around her during the last days of her life.

Offering condolences to the family on the loss of their mother, Ombudsman Margaret Kelly said;

'The experience of watching her mother deteriorate during her time in the home, and the impact that Covid 19 had on visiting, must have been extremely distressing for the complainant and her family.'

I have asked the home to apologise for the failings highlighted in my report. I have also recommended that it should bring the failings to the attention of the relevant staff and create an action plan to address the shortcomings identified.'