

## Sensible Risk Assessments in Care Homes

People who work in care homes constitute a large and diverse workforce looking after a predominantly vulnerable population. Employees have the right to work in a healthy and safe workplace. In addition, the people using services are entitled to care and support that is safe and takes their needs, freedom and dignity into account.

Managing these different needs can sometimes present unique and complex situations, which can, if not effectively managed, result in serious harm to employees, those using care services and others. Common care home hazards include slips and trips, moving and handling, violent or aggressive behaviour, falls, diseases and much more.

A risk assessment (a process required by law) is not about creating huge amounts of paperwork; it is about identifying and taking sensible and proportionate measures to control the risks. You may already be taking steps to control the risks, but the assessment process will help you decide whether you should be doing more. You may need to consider different elements of risk when producing your assessment, including the following:

- The common risks to everyone on the premises, for example, risks from legionella, asbestos, electrical equipment and transport.
- The common risks to people using services, for example, risks from falls from height or scalding. While you may have some individuals who are not at risk, you must implement measures to prevent harm to the most vulnerable individuals.

- The individual risks to particular staff, for example, expectant mothers and young workers.
- The individual risks to particular people using services, for example, the risk of an individual falling out of bed or needing help to safely mobilise.

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### Making Sensible Risk Assessment Decisions

The provision of care and support should be tailored to meet the needs of individual residents and should encourage them to do what they can for themselves. Often when assessing the care and support needs, everyday activities are identified that will benefit the resident, but also put him or her at some level of risk. This requires a balanced decision between the needs, freedom and dignity of the individual and their safety.

Care assessments should enable people to live fulfilled lives safely, rather than be a mechanism for restricting their reasonable freedoms. Many care providers find it hard not to slip towards a risk-averse approach for a multitude of reasons. Some examples include lack of resources, poor previous experiences and a fear of the consequences if things go wrong.

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Consider the following points when balancing risks:

- Concentrate on real risks where there is a realistic risk of harm.
- Communicate with the individual, caregiver and family when carrying out risk assessments in order to achieve outcomes that matter to them.
- Determine how risks that emerge from an individual's choice can best be reduced, so far as is reasonably practicable, by putting in place sensible controls.
- Analyse how the most vulnerable can be protected when organising group activities, without unnecessarily restricting the freedoms of the most capable.

## Examples of Sensible Risk Management

Use the following examples to help implement sensible risk management in your care home.

- **Individual risks when walking to the local shop**

A resident who walked to the local shop on a daily basis to collect the newspaper developed Alzheimer's. He became confused and started to forget how to get back to the care home. Having considered different possibilities, the shop owner agreed to give a gentle reminder of the route home every time the resident visited. This, coupled with checks by the home, allowed the resident to continue with his daily routine – subject to regular review. Other control measures may be appropriate, dependent on the individual.

- **Individual risks when making a cup of tea**

A resident with learning disabilities was vulnerable to the risk of scalding but benefitted from being able to make his own cup of tea. Proper risk assessment identified that the size, weight and volume of water in a standard kettle put the resident at risk of serious harm. However, using a single cup hot water dispenser was a reasonably practicable solution. Owing to the resident's physical condition and tendency to shake, a cup

with a limited opening (spill resistant) was also provided.

- **Individual risks when a person with dementia is wandering from the care setting**

A resident with dementia developed a tendency to wander away from the care setting. The resident was formerly employed in a job where they walked long distances on a daily basis. Assessment indicated that the main risk was from getting lost. The care staff, family and resident all agreed to the use of a tracking and personal alarm system, which alerted the care home if the resident became lost.

- **Individual risks when helping to cook in a care home**

A resident wished to help in the kitchen at a home. The individual had dementia but was able to carry out certain activities without much support, and helping in the kitchen provided great benefits to the individual and reduced boredom. An assessment of the kitchen identified that some of the equipment presented a significant risk. However, it was decided that the individual could undertake certain tasks under supervision.

- **Individual risks for outdoor activities**

A resident with Down syndrome wanted to ride a horse on a group outing. If allowed, the resident was then vulnerable to the risk of falling and may not have had the capacity to appreciate the potential danger. However, caregivers decided that the benefits and enjoyment he gained from carrying out the activity outweighed the risks. An assessment identified suitable measures that reduced the risk, including the selection of a reputable leisure provider, use of protective clothing, safe supportive seating, the selection of a suitable horse and close supervision.

Residents can enjoy many different activities if risks are properly assessed and practical solutions are implemented. Contact Robison & Co Ltd for more information on health and safety in the care sector.

Source: The Health and Safety Executive ([www.hse.gov.uk](http://www.hse.gov.uk)).