

Teaching Care Homes: The centres of excellence for care, training and practice development.

Foreword by Professor Martin Green OBE, Chief Executive Care England, DH: Independent Sector Dementia Champion

In the past 30 years we have seen a tremendous change in the population of care homes and they have developed from being a lifestyle choice, to the place where people who have multiple health conditions live because they need constant support. The people who live in care homes today, usually have at least four serious long-term conditions, and a large percentage of them are living with some form of dementia.

The change in the care home population, and the increased complexity of residents, has gone largely unnoticed by the rest of the system, and the enhanced skills and competencies of the care home staff, have not received proper recognition. In many areas, such as dementia, and end of life care, the care home is a centre of excellence with so much expertise and knowledge that could be so valuable to other parts of the health and social care system.

In not recognising the skills and experience of care home staff, the system is ignoring a fount of knowledge that could inform best practice and improve care in all settings.

The Teaching Care Homes pilot was set up to ensure that people who are training to be the next generation of health and social care professionals, could learn from the experience of the care home sector, and would be better equipped to manage the health complexities and social care needs of an ageing population. The pilot was also set up to ensure that the staff in care homes had the confidence and time to be centres of learning, as well as care.

Thanks to the commitment, professionalism, and passion of the people working in care homes that were part of this pilot, we have seen the benefits of the care home as a centre of training and practice development. Integration will only happen when all bits of the system work together and share their knowledge across all services.

I want to pay tribute to all those who were involved in this work, especially to the Managers and Staff of all those care homes who took part. I also want to thank the Chief Executives of the participating organisations, for the leadership they showed in supporting their services to enter this initiative.

The Teaching Care Homes Pilot was a collaborative project, and I want to offer my thanks to our partners at the Foundation of Nursing Studies, Manchester Metropolitan University, and the International Longevity Centre, who have all worked tirelessly to ensure that this pilot programme was a success.

I am particularly grateful to Professor Deborah Sturdy who initiated the idea and has led and developed the programme throughout the pilot phase. Without Deborah's vision, energy and commitment this pilot would not have been possible.

The first stage of the Teaching Care Homes Pilot has been a resounding success, and our challenge for the future is to mainstream this work and to ensure that the whole system benefits from the expertise and knowledge of the professionals working in the care home sector.