

Care Home Survey: Knowledge, Attitudes and Practices Concerning LGBT Residents



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Introduction

In response to an online survey and following visits to seven care homes in the East Midlands and Northwest regions, one hundred and eighty nine (189) care home staff in England completed our questionnaire. The sample was mostly female (82%), middle-aged (between 41 and 60), white British (94%), Christian (48%), heterosexual (92%) and working as a care assistant (32%) or in a managerial role (34%). There is lots of individual goodwill towards old/er lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) residents but care homes could be doing more to address the issues in a more strategic way.

Key findings

A positive picture emerges concerning attitudes to LGBT residents:

- Just over four-fifths of respondents (82%) reported that they would not feel embarrassed talking about LGBT issues.
- Just over four-fifths (83%) of those responding did not consider same-sex relationships to be wrong.
- Nearly four-fifths (79%) agreed that residents should be enabled to express their sexual needs and nearly two-thirds (65%) believed that residents were or could be 'sexually active.'
- Just over two-thirds of respondents (68%) disagreed that their religious beliefs negatively impacted upon their ability to accept LGBT people.

Knowledge of LGB&T issues:

- Nearly three quarters of those responding (73%) considered they had reasonable knowledge of LGBT issues.
- All respondents showed some awareness of legal and policy requirements and that discrimination should be avoided.

When asked about knowing of LGB&T residents in their care homes:

- A majority of 57% of respondents speculated that there were LGBT people in the care home and a quarter of respondents were unsure whether there were any LGBT residents in their care home.
- Just over two-thirds of respondents (67%) reported that not a single resident had disclosed their sexual or gender difference. Just under a quarter (24%) reported any such disclosure.

As regards monitoring and other practices, the responses identified areas for further work:

- Just over half (52%) of those responding indicated not feeling confident about educating others about issues concerning LGBT individuals.
- A quarter of respondents thought their care home monitored residents by sexual orientation and gender identity and 43% reported being 'unsure' about whether such monitoring was conducted.
- Forty three percent of those responding indicated that their home uses appropriate language on assessment forms but 40% were not sure and 18% said that this was not the case.

- Only one in twenty respondents (5%) indicated that their care home uses images of LGBT people in its literature, 44% were unsure and 51% answered in the negative. Only 9% of respondents indicated that their care home made LGBT-specific literature available and nearly three in ten (28%) were unaware of this and just under one in five (19%) neither agreed nor disagreed.
- Eight percent indicated that homes made efforts to be in touch with LGBT organizations, 34% indicating that this was not the case and 34% of respondents were unsure about this. Nearly a quarter (24%) neither agreed nor disagreed.
- Three in ten respondents felt that their home encouraged residents to contribute to an LGBT-friendly atmosphere, though a fifth disagreed. Just over three in ten (31%) neither agreed nor disagreed and 17% were unsure whether this was the case.
- A quarter of respondents indicated that their care home encouraged open discussion of LGBT issues, though just over three in ten (31%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement and nearly a quarter 23% were ‘unsure.’

Awareness of care home policies relating to LGBT residents:

- A third of respondents reported that internal policies made reference to LGBT individuals, the majority or nearly a half (48%) being ‘unsure’ and nearly one in five (19%) answered in the negative.
- Whilst 47% knew that their care home had a strategy for dealing with attempts at victimization of LGBT residents, 41% were ‘unsure’ of such a strategy and 12% indicated that their care home did not have such a strategy.
- A quarter of respondents thought their care home monitored residents by sexual orientation and gender identity and 43% reported being ‘unsure’ about whether such monitoring was conducted.

Training and training needs:

- Nearly two in three respondents (64%) agreed that staff should receive training on the needs of LGBT people, though just over a fifth (22%) felt neutral about this.
- A quarter of those responding reported that their care home makes available training for staff that aims to sensitize them to LGBT relationships. But, nearly a third (32%) of respondents was ‘unsure’ and almost three in ten people (29%) answered in the negative.
- Nearly four-fifths (78%) of respondents indicated that they had never been provided with any LGBT-specific training in their current workplaces and only 13% reported ever having had such training.
- Forty four percent of respondents wanted more LGBT-specific training, though almost one in five (19%) were ‘unsure’ and 37% considered that they did not need this.

Take-home messages

Whilst attitudes were generally positive, knowledge of LGBT individuals and issues was more variable if not erratic. Staff may not be so well supported in terms of training and could be struggling alone to meet needs. There was also a lack of strategic monitoring of the numbers of LGBT residents and work with residents concerning sexual/gender difference. The goodwill of staff needs converting into more strategic practice to make homes more LGBT inclusive.