

Abstracts

Community Care or Home Care

Julia Twigg

Nancy N. Eustis and Lucy Rose Fischer, Relationships between home care clients and their workers: implications for quality of care. *The Gerontologist*, 31, 4 (1991), 447–456.

Much of the recent American work on quality assurance in relation to home care – itself a relatively new and burgeoning field in the States – has focussed on securing the performance of tasks or on training and accreditation. Little attention has been paid to client perspectives on quality. What work has been done suggests the importance in this of interpersonal relations between the client and the worker. In interviews, this is the central preoccupation of clients and the one that most contributes to their sense of the quality of care. This is not to say that the proper performance of tasks is unimportant to them, but that it operates on a parallel to that of Herzberg's famous hygiene factors: necessarily present, but not the incentive to motivate work.

In this context, the study by Eustis and Fischer is a welcome exploration of the relationships that exist between home care clients and workers, and their significance for quality of care assessment. The study focused on 54 long term home care cases, interviewing the clients, the workers and, where appropriate, family members. It was a stratified non-random sample including rural and urban clients, older and younger clients, those who were hired directly as well as those provided for by agencies. The authors accept that there may be some bias in the sample and that agencies may have omitted problem clients or workers. This would be directly relevant to the subject of study – interpersonal relations – and it was noticeable how few cases there were of bad or even cold relations. The sample also appeared to be remarkable stable, another factor that may have contributed to the positive emphasis on relationships found in the study. The authors also point to the lack of ethnic and racial diversity in the study area (Minnesota), and their significance in other parts of the United States.

Although we commonly distinguish analytically between formal and informal caregivers, the study suggests some of the ways in which this dichotomy may be ill adapted to home care. Home care relationships typically cross the boundaries: job responsibilities tend to be diffusely

defined, and most care workers in the study, as in other work, provided extra help that they were not formally contracted to do. Companionship was perceived to be an implicit and sometimes explicit part of what the workers provided. Many clients spoke of the workers in non-contractual, usually familial terms. Home care workers were also by virtue of the location of their work often involved in the 'back stage' world of the client, privy to their intimate environment and non-public behaviour, and this once again blurred the boundaries between public and private, formal and informal. These features of home care work created difficulties for both client and worker. The development of personal bonds was central to satisfaction for both the client and the worker, but threatened the clarity of the roles and violated some of the rules of the relationships. Friendship is by its nature a symmetrical relationship, but that of client and worker is not. There were tensions evident as to where the professional relationship ended and a personal bond began. Conceiving the relationship in a formal way could be beneficial. For workers, informal arrangements threaten to become exploitative because of the lack of boundaries around the job expectations. For clients, there was a danger of loss of control as workers ceased to be guided by job requirements.

Eustis and Fischer suggest certain systematic variations in the views of clients. Not surprisingly rural clients were more likely to see the worker as a friend, and to find that their relationship overlapped with numerous other social contacts. Workers often knew the client by sight or reputation before the paid relationship began. City life was more anomic, and resulted in a more formal relationship. Younger clients were particularly likely to talk about the importance of maintaining a job-oriented relationship and to follow a consumer approach; whereas older clients stressed the family model of care. Interestingly however, younger clients were also more likely to say that they discussed personal problems with the worker; and as a result they appeared to suffer particularly acutely from tensions between the norms of formality and informality. Direct-hire arrangements appeared to go with more mutual confiding, but this may have been a product of the fact that these tended to involve more extensive care. The dilemma of managing personal bonds was particularly evident in this group, suggesting that the direct transfer of money did not eradicate tensions inherent in the relationship.

Comment

This is an excellent study with much relevance to the United Kingdom as we move towards a more fragmented provision of home care and one

in which quality assurance can no longer be pursued internally (and usually implicitly) within organisations but has to be specified between organisations. How one incorporates the aspects of relationship is, however, less clear, and although the authors touch upon implementation and policy issues at the end of the article, they are similarly equivocal as to the appropriate consequences of their work. They suggest the rather negative conclusion that this critical factor in the quality of home care may be outside the domain of policy regulation. I do not think that we need to take such a gloomy view. It may be possible, using work of this type, to specify more closely the conditions that are conducive to the development of a good relationship, and to build these in to the way care is provided. The authors mention for example stability and the matching of clients: both can be included among specifications. It may also be possible to bring out those aspects of jobs like home care that are neglected in formal accounts but which are clearly central both to the reality of the work and to its quality.

I refer to the provision of warmth and closeness, the responsiveness to an individual as such, and the concern with wellbeing. Typically these are features of work that are seen as 'women's work', which suffers from the dual perception of it as of inestimable worth but little value. It is typically badly paid and disregarded within the formal economy. That it is *work* has however been demonstrated clearly in the recent literature on emotional labour. Making people feel good and valued as individuals is for some workers, like nurses or air hostesses, part of their implicit job description and something that they often have to practice in the teeth of their own feelings. Home care is part of this world and we need more empirical and conceptual research to allow us to see these relations more clearly.

Andrew Bebbington and Bleddyn Davies, Efficient targeting of community care: the case of the home help service. *Journal of Social Policy*, 22 3 (1993), 373–391.

The home care service is of central significance in the support of older people and takes a major part of the community care budget. It has not however always received attention from researchers commensurate with its importance. For this reason the continuing work of Bebbington and Davies on the subject is particularly welcome. In this article they develop earlier work on the targeting of the home help service, placing empirical material from the 1980s in the context of current policy debates.

The authors argue that the 1980s saw three policy developments of

particular significance to the targeting of home help. The first was the greater emphasis on concentrating resources on the most needy – on ‘thick’ rather than ‘thin’ spreading of the service. Bodies such as the Audit Commission and the Social Services Inspectorate came to believe that without a greater concentration of provision, resources would be insufficient to meet rising demand. Directors of social services and others in contact with local political realities were more equivocal, recognising that a widely spread service was a popular one and that its withdrawal was likely to be difficult politically. Anxieties were also expressed about the deterioration of those at the ‘light end’ of need once support was withdrawn. The second policy theme which is identified is the new emphasis on the needs of carers. The home help service has traditionally been targeted away from those with kin whom might be assumed to be able to give help, particularly if they share the household with the disabled person. Emphasising the needs of carers for relief reverses this pattern, and raises difficult questions as to how far services should set aside the potential involvement of carers when making their decisions about allocation. The third policy development was the greater emphasis on enabling those who can pay for their care to do so. Davies and his colleagues have shown that an increasing proportion of the costs of community care during the 1980s were recouped from charges, partly as a result of local fiscal stress, particularly in Labour authorities. The authors recognise that the government guidance does recommend that charges should not be so high to lead to under-consumption by those in the highest priority need, but they remain agnostic about the price elasticity of demand for home care.

In order to determine the impact of these shifts in policy, Bebbington and Davies examine the changes that have occurred in the receipt of home care as evidenced in the General Household Survey between 1980 and 1985. This builds on their earlier work which distinguishes between horizontal target efficiency (the proportion of those in priority need who receive the service) and vertical target efficiency (the proportion of recipients which satisfy the criteria defining need). In general they conclude that despite the slight increase in home help during the period, the service did not become better targeted. There was some evidence that territorial equity among different authorities improved. Gender discrimination may however have got worse. The 1980 evidence suggested that a man caring for his disabled wife was more likely to get help than the reverse case, and Bebbington and Davies interpret this in terms of the way in which the service primarily sees itself as relating to the wife’s rather than the husband’s disability.

There was no evidence in 1980 for gender discrimination in relation to single men and women. One surprising development however was that the increase in home help provision between 1980 and 1985 went almost entirely to elderly men living alone. The evidence from both 1980 and 1985 shows that both vertical and horizontal target efficiency are higher for women than men, suggesting that the former allocation is more closely linked to disability.

Certain overriding patterns remain the same. The service is still heavily targeted at those who are over eighty, regardless of their level of disability; and the authors interpret this – perhaps rather charitably – in terms of risk avoidance in relation to the vulnerable, rather than of stereotypical assessments. The service also remains heavily targeted on those who live alone, again reflecting risk aversion as well as the low priority given to the relief of carers. The 1980s were ostensibly a period of change for the home help service and yet, as Bebbington and Davies show, things remained remarkably the same, with if anything a slight shift in directions that were counter-indicated by the policy debate. What this bodes for the more radical changes ostensibly underway as part of the ‘New community care’ remains unclear, but it must at least raise a question mark over the ease with which authorities or agencies will be able to move to closer targeting in this area. We await Bebbington and Davies’s subsequent analyses with great interest.

Social Policy and Professional Studies,
University of Hull

Politics and Pensions in Europe

Tony Maltby

G. Wilson, The challenge of an ageing electorate: changes in the formation of social policy in Europe? *Journal of European Social Policy*, 3, 2 (1993), 91–105.

W. Schmähl, The ‘1992 reform’ of public pensions in Germany: main elements and some effects. *Journal of European Social Policy*, 3, 1 (1993), 39–51.

Throughout Europe the reform of public pensions remains at the top of the political agenda. These articles, although distinctive, both link to this common theme. Among the European Community countries in particular, the impetus for such reform by national governments has been the alleged effects of a ‘demographic time-bomb’, a reduction in the working population and the perceived inability of those govern-