



The Swallows Care Home Virtual Enter and View Visit

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Introduction

What is Healthwatch Lewisham?

Healthwatch Lewisham is one of 152 local Healthwatch organisations that were established throughout England in 2013, under the provisions of the Health and Social Care Act 2012. The dual role of local Healthwatch is to champion the rights of users of health and social care services and to hold the system to account for how well it engages with the public.

The remit of Healthwatch Lewisham as an independent health and social care watchdog is to be the voice of local people and ensure that health and social care services are safe, effective and designed to meet the needs of patients, social care users and carers.

Healthwatch Lewisham gives children, young people and adults in Lewisham a stronger voice to influence and challenge how health and social care services are purchased, provided and reviewed within the borough.

Our Key Functions

1. Gathering the views and experiences of service users, carers, and the wider community,
2. Making people's views known,
3. Involving locals in the commissioning process for health and social care services, and process for their continual scrutiny,
4. Referring providers of concern to Healthwatch England, or the CQC, to investigate,
5. Providing information about which services are available to access and signposting,
6. Collecting views and experiences and communicating them to Healthwatch England,
7. Working with the Health and Wellbeing board in Lewisham on the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Joint Health and Wellbeing strategy (which will influence the commissioning process).

Strategic Drivers

Our role is to support the voices and views of the local community and to ensure their opinions are taken into account when services are commissioned.

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 gives local Healthwatch the statutory power to carry out Enter and View visits to publicly funded health and social care services to hear the views of service users, their families and carers.

Our reports are published on our website and shared with the South East London Clinical Commissioning Group, the Council's Scrutiny Committee, the Care Quality Commission and the Health and Wellbeing Board.

This report presents the findings from a virtual Enter and View visit to The Swallows Care Home, 318 Brownhill Rd, London SE6 1AX. The Swallows provides residential accommodation for persons who require nursing or personal care and caring for adults over 65.

The residential care home has recently undergone a refurbishment which has seen the maximum capacity of beds increase from 19 to 33. Additional space has been created to make en-suites available in every room. At the time of the visit, the care home had 30 residents many of whom had dementia. This report will highlight areas where The Swallows is succeeding, and areas that may need improvement.

The purpose of our virtual visit to The Swallows was multifaceted. Our organisation decided to carry out a pilot visit to a care home in Lewisham to better understand the experiences of residents and family members during lockdown. We liaised with the local authority who suggested the care home as a potential location because of the recent refurbishment and change of management in September 2020.



Methodology

During the COVID-19 pandemic local care home providers stopped allowing visitors into care homes as an infection prevention measure. In response, we introduced a new digital approach to delivering our Enter and View Programme.

As part of the new approach, the care home will provide a virtual observation by streaming footage of the communal areas while answering the questions of the Healthwatch Authorised Representatives. The virtual tour would be supported by interviews with residents, staff, family members and online questionnaires for those who were unavailable on the day of the visit.

Our visit was announced, taking particular factors into consideration including:

- Whether the provider had the capacity to accommodate a virtual visit
- Identifying potential patients/residents and staff members whom we would be able to interview whilst ensuring no disruption to the service
- Identifying any potential issues such as residents being uncomfortable speaking with us via digital tools, or technology problems on the day of the visit

Limitations

We recognise the increased pressures the COVID-19 pandemic has put on local services. However, at times, limited communication from the Swallows staff team to information requests impacted heavily on the delivery and timelines of the visit.

Issues with wi-fi connectivity within the care home also meant that a virtual observation was not suitable. Prior to the visit, the service kindly shared several videos of the care home to enable the Authorised Representatives to have a better understanding of the layout and internal activities.

Disclaimer: This report relates only to the service viewed on the date(s) of the virtual visit and is representative of the views of the family and staff who contributed to the report.

The Swallows during COVID-19

The following information has been gathered through conversations with the service manager. We were unable to corroborate the information with visual evidence due to technical difficulties preventing us from carrying out a virtual observation.

Infection control

An infection control system has been implemented which involves daily temperature checks for staff and an extra cleaning regime during the day, evening and night. Outside agencies must fill out a questionnaire before entering the property to inform the service if they are experiencing any symptoms and where they have travelled from.

Staff are required to wear mask when on duty, especially when they are moving around the care home. Information about washing hands and social distancing has been put up throughout the care home. Residents are given reminders as to why staff need to wear masks.

A bubble system has been put in place where residents are grouped together when doing activities or if they want to use a communal area which helps to maintain existing friendships.

From talking to the service manager, we learnt that there had been no diagnosed cases of COVID-19 up until January 2021 when two residents tested positive. The residents were asymptomatic but were quarantined until they had returned negative tests in abundance with infection control measures. During the pandemic, staff have been tested on a weekly basis, whilst residents undertook monthly tests.

All staff and residents have received their COVID-19 and flu vaccination with the process being considered straightforward. The service has not had any issues with accessing PPE or with making GP or multidisciplinary team referrals.



Communication between residents and family members

Residents have been unable to leave the care home during the pandemic due to safety reasons. In order for families to physically interact with their relatives, socially distanced garden visits were organised in the summer. As the weather turned colder, a perplex screen was set up in the Foyer but this is no longer permissible in the current Tier 5 restrictions.

Window visits are still available and weekly WhatsApp calls are organised by the assistant manager allowing family members to keep in touch.

Activities

A life review is carried out when residents first move into the care home. This involves a family member or someone close to the resident giving a synopsis of their life and interests. A one-page profile is created and shared with the activities co-ordinator to develop appropriate activities.

Residents can choose their activities each day which include singing, painting, drawing and The Daily Sparkle, a reminiscence newspaper. If residents do not want to partake, they can visit the quiet lounges to read newspapers, do crosswords, solve puzzles or play chess.

Dietary Needs

The care home provides a rolling 4-week seasonal menu where a different meal is cooked every day. Residents who are able, can be involved with the food choices; family members are also asked about any preferences for their loved ones. The chef engages with residents every evening about their choice of meals.

Feedback and complaints

The Swallows currently gathers feedback on their service through digital quality assurance surveys that are shared with family members. Staff understand residents' views through daily conversations and quarterly resident meetings. Residents are made aware of how they can raise their concerns and the procedures they would need to go through. Complaints information is displayed within the care home.

Staff training

The service provides online training courses including safeguarding, dignity and care, dementia, health and safety, allergy, food hygiene and medication training. Staff are expected to complete training within 3 months of joining the organisation.

Training in response to COVID-19 has mostly focused on infection prevention control which was rolled out by adult social care. All staff have undergone 'donning and doffing' training which provides guidance on how to put on and take off masks/ gloves in a health and social care setting to prevent the spreading of infection through clothes.

Summary of findings

Virtual Observation

As mentioned earlier in this report, limited wi-fi connectivity within the care home meant that a virtual observation of the premises was not a viable option. In response, The Swallows shared a recorded virtual tour of the building and two videos of staff and resident's 'New Year's' celebrations prior to the visit.

Our organisation was extremely grateful for the additional footage. However, we found that the video tour was rather limited with it predominantly focusing on information displayed around social distancing and washing hands along the corridors. It was agreed that the service would send a further video after the visit, but this has not yet been received.

The video supplied by the provider included examples of residents' bedroom which seemed to be spacious, clean and personable. En-suites were tidy and suitably adapted. It was difficult to understand how the general layout of the service worked when reviewing the video footage.

Signage within the care home appeared clear and simple; with fire exits and fire extinguishers being easily visible. We were unable to identify any noticeboards or information regarding feedback, complaints, food menus, activities or organisational policies.

The two 'New Year's celebrations' videos showed staff and residents having friendly interactions and dancing to music indicating a good relationship between them. However, it should be noted that some residents in the lounge were not engaged with the activities and appeared uninterested. Authorised Representatives also noticed that a staff member was not wearing their mask correctly and therefore not following the infection control procedures.



Interviews

The Swallows Care Home provided us with the contact details of staff and family members on the day of the virtual visit. We were able to carry out phone interviews with three staff members and three family members as part of the Enter & View.

Staff experiences

- All staff members we spoke to enjoy their work and felt extremely supported by their colleagues. They feel that the service is better run since the change of management in September
- The recent refurbishment changes were considered a positive addition and described as “friendly and welcoming”
- Staff felt safe during the pandemic and believe the care home has implemented effective infection control measures to prevent the spreading of COVID-19
- Staff highlighted the emotional toll that COVID-19 has had on residents. Residents have been affected by not being able to see their families regularly due to the restrictions imposed
- They valued having time set aside every day for discussions with colleagues where they could talk about issues such as their mental health
- Non-care staff would value receiving more information about safeguarding procedures or any updates if there have been changes to protocols due to the pandemic
- Staff do not feel that there have been any issues with residents accessing health services during the pandemic

“Caring is something that I love. I love seeing the residents happy with a smile on their face”.

Staff member

Experiences of family members

- Family members were generally positive about their experience with the care home and how the staff have supported their loved ones since the outbreak of COVID-19
- The service was lauded for its infection control measures and how it has managed to keep staff and residents safe and well. Some family members feel that staff should receive greater recognition for their efforts and sacrifices (several staff moved into the care home during the pandemic)
- The care home's assistant manager was singled out for praise. Family members found her to be an excellent communicator who was personable yet professional. They valued the weekly WhatsApp calls with their loved ones which were facilitated by the assistant manager
- Family members appreciated being able to visit their relatives through window visits and socially distanced garden visits in the summer. However, they were disappointed by the limited face to face opportunities offered during the year. Two relatives were frustrated by the service 'overpromising' and not delivering on the creation of a visitor's room
- For some family members, socially distanced visits can be emotionally difficult because they are unable to physically interact with their loved ones
- Family members would value receiving timely information from the service about the planned visiting arrangements once the national lockdown restrictions are lifted
- People have not felt able to comment on activities or changes to internal spaces as they haven't been able to see them. Further information about activities and changes to the service would be appreciated by family members
- One family member found the weekly online newsletter to be helpful and allowed them to stay informed about the service
- Family members were satisfied with how the care home has dealt with any concerns they have raised

Conclusion and Recommendations

Technological and communication difficulties have impacted on the delivery of the Enter & View visit to the Swallows Care Home. However, we do recognise the additional pressures that local services have been under during the pandemic.

From talking to staff and residents' family members, our Authorised Representatives found that the service appeared to have a robust infection control procedure and has managed to support residents and family members to regularly communicate despite the lockdown. Family members feel that their relatives are safe and staff felt protected from the virus. The 'New Year's celebration' videos indicate that there is a good relationship between staff and residents.

Through observation and interview, Healthwatch staff feel improvements could be made around communication relating to visiting arrangements, safeguarding training and staff compliance to infection control measures.

Recommendations

1. Some family members were frustrated by the service 'overpromising' and not delivering on the creation of a visitor's room. They would value receiving timely information from the service about the future visiting arrangements.

Recommendation: The development of a clear, realistic step by step plan outlining the visiting arrangements for the service after the national lockdown is lifted

2. Non-care staff wanted to receive more information about safeguarding procedures or get updates if there have been any changes to protocols due to the pandemic.

Recommendation: Delivery of a safeguarding training refresher for non-care staff

3. Family members told us that there had not been any relatives' meetings held since the outbreak of the pandemic. They would find it helpful to chat with family and friends of other residents

Recommendation: We would suggest that the service offer the option of an online meeting for family and friends which would be accessible for people who have limited or no access to the internet

4. The service was lauded for its infection control measures and how it has managed to keep staff and residents safe and well. Some family members feel that staff should receive greater recognition for their efforts and sacrifices

Recommendation: Development of an employee recognition programme which rewards staff for their achievements, dedication, anniversaries or milestones. This could be supported by the inclusion of articles within the weekly bulletin that recognises the contributions of staff

5. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant emotional impact on staff, residents, family members and the wider community

Recommendation: When appropriate and safe to do so, the care home should look to organise an event to celebrate the lifting of lockdown and enable staff, residents, relatives and friends to come together

6. The Swallows has developed a weekly online bulletin which is shared with family members to keep them updated about the service

Recommendation: The service must ensure that the information shared is accessible to everyone, including those who are digitally excluded or have limited access to the internet

7. Authorised Representatives noticed that a staff member was not wearing their mask correctly when engaging with residents and therefore not following the infection control procedures

Recommendation: Staff need to ensure they are wearing their face masks consistently when interacting with residents

Acknowledgements

Enter and View Authorised Representatives:
Carolyn Denne, Catherine Jenkins and Mathew Shaw

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