

Exploring the Role of the Enhanced Care Worker

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International Longevity Centre – UK



The International Longevity Centre-UK is an independent, non-partisan think tank dedicated to addressing issues in policy impacted by population ageing and demographic change.



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The ILC Global Alliance



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Innovate to Alleviate:

Exploring how the role of an enhanced care worker could address skills shortages in the social care sector

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Planning tomorrow **today**

- Examined the emergence of a new role in care homes, the Enhanced Care Worker (ECW)
- Telephone interviews in 10 care homes
- Insights rather than evaluation

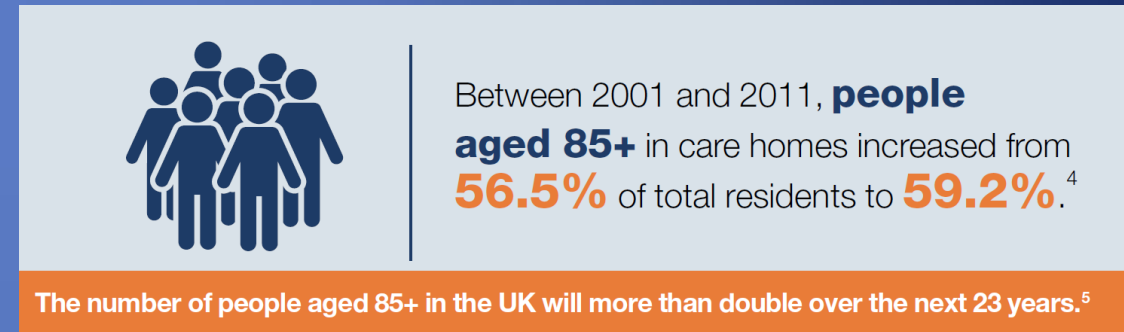
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The Current Landscape in the Social Care Sector

78% of residential care and nursing home places are provided by the private sector; 14% from voluntary /charitable organisations, 3% NHS, 5% LAs

The profile of residents arriving in care homes is changing

- The number in care homes stable between 2001-2011 – informal care & home services
- More complex and challenging needs – co-morbidities, dementia



Staffing and funding issues

- 7.6% vacancy rate for nurses in social care, 32.1% turnover rate
- 13% NHS nurses in England are aged 55+; 30% in care homes
- Agency workers plugging the gap, but short-term solution

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Methodology

Identified homes with the ECW through existing networks and umbrella bodies in the sector

Interviewed staff in 10 care homes with the role

- Home size ranged from around 30 to around 100 residents
- Staff at three levels: manager, registered nurse, and the ECW
 - 23 people interviewed:
 - 7 managers, 8 RNs, 6 ECWs
 - 3 high-level representatives
- Semi-structured interviews by telephone, around 20 minutes each
- Online survey on awareness and prevalence of the role
 - Too few responses to report the results

Limitations: no care recipients, caution on over-generalisation, selection effect

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Characteristics of the ECW

While not a uniform role across the sector, a number of similarities:

- **Enhanced Clinical Support**

- A variety of clinical tasks, independently or assisting the nurse: administration of medication, simple wound care, as well as: ensuring care profiles are up to date; assisting in developing care plans; taking blood pressure; helping with nutrition plans; managing vital signs; and conducting blood sugar analysis

- **Softer Skills**

- In addition for qualifications & training: learning quickly, desire to advance their career, 'going the extra mile'

- **Leadership & Management**

- Ability to cope well with stress, natural leadership skills, coping well under pressure, taking the initiative

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Key Themes on the ECW

- Training and Skills Specific to a Care Setting
- Relationship between the RN and ECW
- Concerns over Accountability
- Internal Development of the Role
- The ECW Role Makes a Difference
- Need for Better Support from the NHS

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Key Themes on the ECW

Training and Skills Specific to a Care Setting

- Nursing in social care settings is quite different from nursing in hospitals
- Personal motivation, ability to emotionally connect with the role and care recipients important
- Many felt supported to ask for further training (and to receive it) when there were issues of confidence or proficiency
- Still, concerns over availability of suitable opportunities and lack of staff

“Nurses found it hard to let go of those skills originally, but now they are seeing the benefits. They are seeing they are here to help, and the carers are actually seeing how difficult the role of a nurse actually is.” RN

“[Workers] can be qualified up to the hilt, but if they don't have empathy it's irrelevant.” RN

Key Themes on the ECW

Relationship between the RN and the ECW

- Needs to be strong, with trust and good communication
- Initial tensions: RNs reluctant to hand over responsibilities; seemed to ease over time
- Strengthened by including ECWs in regular meetings

“The RNs aren’t 100% sure what the new roles are allowed to do... The RNs are a bit protective of their roles.” **ECW**

“The nurses’ concerns were around medication. When they are on duty, they are responsible for the actions of the [ECWs]. The [ECWs] are accountable for their own actions, but the nurses do still feel vulnerable.”

Manager

Key Themes on the ECW

Concerns over Accountability

- Shaped the relationship between the RN and ECW
- Interfered with an effective collaboration
- Different approaches to addressing accountability
- Wariness among some RNs, but seemed less of an issue where RN was actively involved in developing the

“There are lines of accountability, but the [ECWs] are responsible for their own actions, because they have received the full competency training.” RN

“RNs retain accountability, so it’s always up to the RNs that the training is up to date... In the beginning...the boundaries weren’t really set [between] what the RN does and what the carers do. Over the years, we have developed really strong working relationship between the RN and workers... Everyone understands the accountability process.”

RN

Key Themes on the ECW

Internal Development of the Role

- ECWs mostly were generated internally by care homes
- Many important qualities (e.g. recognising dedication) are better observed by working with someone
- The role provides career progression and helps retention

“Never thought I would be able to make a career out of being a carer, but now feels there is real career progression after 16 years in the job!” **ECW**

Key Themes on the ECW

The ECW Role Makes a Difference

- Overwhelming support for a strong and positive impact on delivering high quality care
- The role enhanced the care, e.g. ECW's daily interaction with residents
- Beneficial for residents, sometimes more open to discussing concerns with the ECW

“When we’re doing the care plans, it’s great to have different perspectives. The new workers have daily conversations with the residents, and they have sometimes a closer understanding of a resident.” **RN**

“[ECWs] really are worth their weight in gold [due to the heavy burden of numbers of patients].” **RN**

“Yes, definitely [the support given by the ECWs is helpful]. They’re a hidden gem.” **RN**

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Key Themes on the ECW

Need for Better Support from the NHS

- More than just financial
- Calls for training opportunities and efforts to make social care nursing regarded on equal footing with nurses in the health sector
- Concerns the roles could collapse without proper support

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Conclusions & Lessons Learned

- Clear communication on the lines of accountability and the delegation of tasks
- An open environment for communication
- Involvement of both RNs and ECWs in regular planning meetings
- A focus on or recognition of softer skills
- Recognise that there will be growing pains

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Many thanks!

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