

healthwatch

South Tyneside

The impact of Covid-19 on South Tyneside care homes

Research report

July 2021

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1. Introduction and methodology

Following the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting rules surrounding the visiting of care home residents, Healthwatch South Tyneside commissioned Bluegrass Research to gather insights into the pandemic's effect on the emotional wellbeing of those residing in care homes in South Tyneside.

A quantitative methodology approach was taken, comprising two surveys which gathered perspectives from two cohorts:

- Quantitative online survey with care home staff
- Quantitative online survey with relatives and friends of care home residents.

STAFF

A self-completed online survey of approximately 10 minutes length was distributed to staff via the managers of South Tyneside's 32 care homes. The survey was live between 8th April 2021 and 4th June 2021. A total sample of 75 care home staff members from 20 care homes was achieved.

RELATIVES AND FRIENDS

Similarly, this was also a self-completed online survey of approximately 10 minutes length. Distribution of the survey was achieved in part by the managers of South Tyneside care homes, who were willing to assist in the dissemination of the survey to their databases of visitors via email.

Where databases of family and friends' email addresses were not held, then care homes were sent a poster with a QR code to the survey to be handed out to visitors on arrival.

This survey was also promoted via the Healthwatch South Tyneside website and social media channels, and the HealthNet and Age Concern networks. The survey was live between 8th April 2021 and 4th June 2021. A total sample of 81 relatives and friends of residents at 11 care homes was achieved.

In this report, we are simply presenting the views we have heard. We are not making recommendations.

2. Research findings

Sample profile

STAFF

The staff profile had a large female bias, and most were White British, between the ages of 25-64. Half had heard of Healthwatch South Tyneside. The majority worked in care-giving roles and worked there for more than a year. One in four worked at Cheviot Court Residential Home.

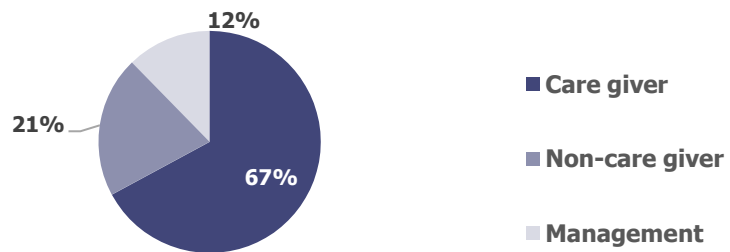
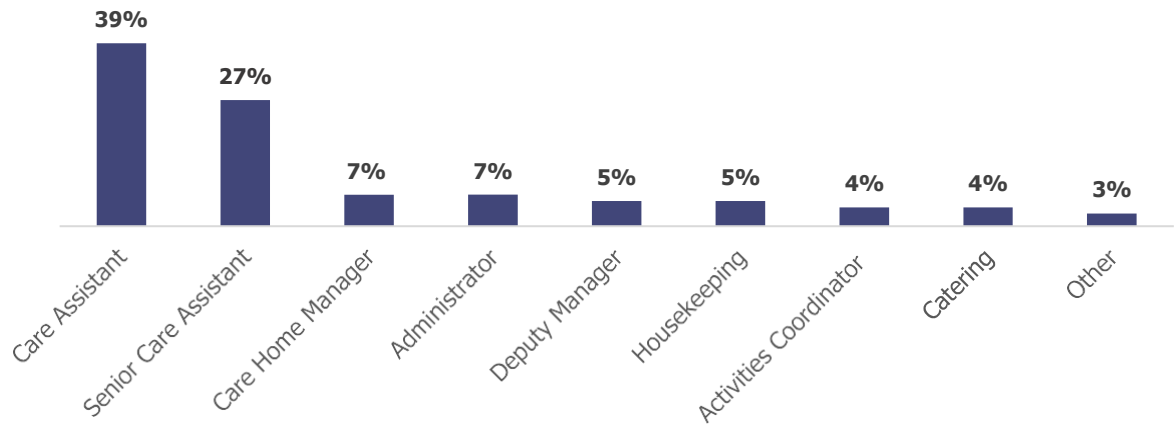
RELATIVES AND FRIENDS

The relatives and friends sample had less of a female bias, and even less ethnic diversity. Most were aged 50-64 and lived within South Tyneside but had not typically heard of Healthwatch South Tyneside. All were family relations - rather than friends - of a care home resident. Two in five were related to a resident in Hawthorn Court, and three in five had a relative who has lived at their care home for more than a year. Over half of those people visited their loved one every three days or more often before the pandemic.

Relationship with care home

Figure 1: Which of the following best describes your job role at the care home?

STAFF

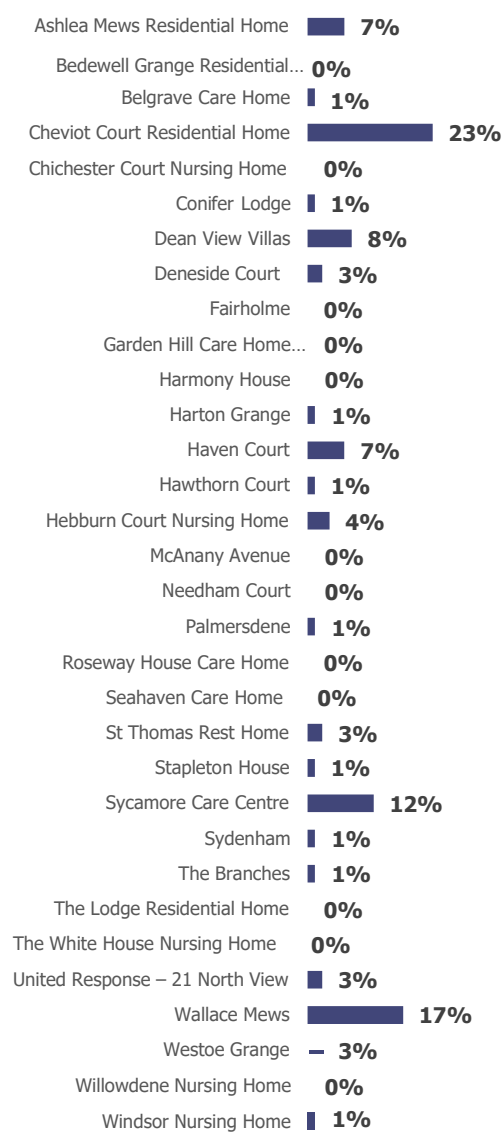


BASE: STAFF (75)

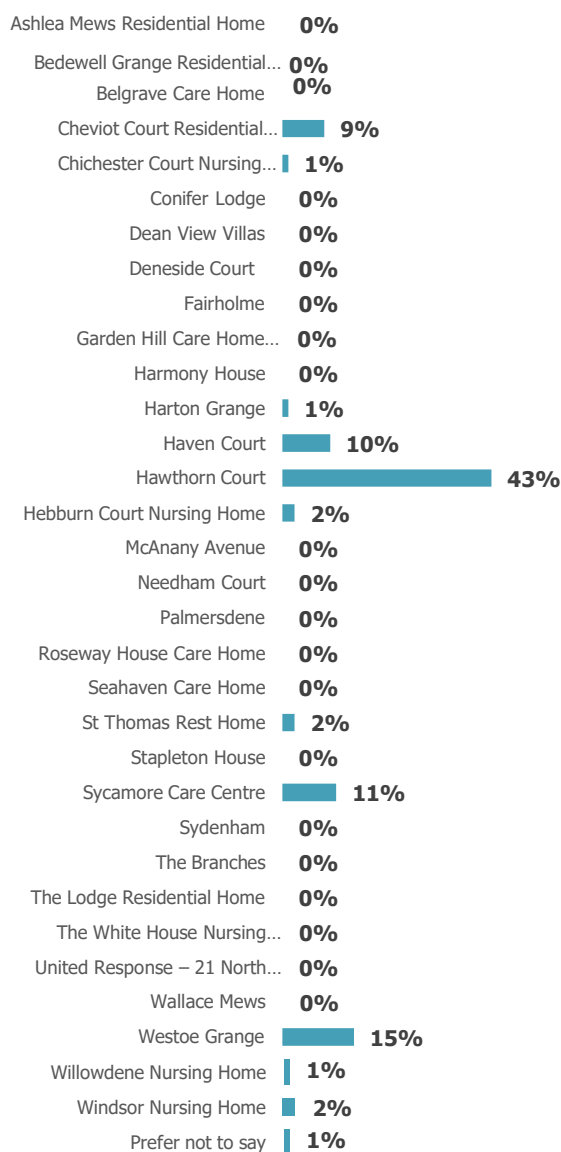
Two thirds of the staff sample are employed in care-giving roles at the care homes [67%], and one in five work in non-care-giving roles such as administration, housekeeping, activities and catering [21%]. The remaining proportion work in management as care home managers and deputies [12%].

**Figure 2: Please select the care home in which you work [STAFF]
Please select the South Tyneside Care home in which your relative/friend lives [RELATIVES & FRIENDS].**

STAFF



RELATIVES & FRIENDS



BASE: STAFF (75); RELATIVES AND FRIENDS (81)

The staff survey returned responses from a wider spread of care homes than the relatives and friends survey, with around one in four staff working at Cheviot Court Residential Home, and one in six at Wallace Mews; the two most represented care homes [23%; 17%]. Of the 32 care homes in South Tyneside, the staff sample represents 20 of them, a proportion of 63%.

The sample of relatives and friends have family members or friends in 11 of the 32 care homes, a proportion of 38%. Therefore, this sample is made up from a smaller number of care homes, with Hawthorn Court being the most represented at over two in five [43%], and notably more than the next care home, Westoe Grange [15%].

Overall, there are 10 care homes in South Tyneside not represented in either sample profile.

Satisfaction with and perceptions of contact with residents

STAFF

The large majority of staff reported that window visits and video calls were made possible during the pandemic, and they were both seen to have a very positive impact on residents' emotional wellbeing. Less than half of staff reported their home taking the needs of those with complex conditions into consideration when handling visits or contact, but if they did, it generally involved extra support during video calls. Residents had access to phones and mostly to iPads or tablets, but only two in five staff members had been given specific training to assist with using the technology for 'virtual visiting'. Overall, staff rated the efforts of the care home's facilitating of contact highly. Qualitatively, 'pod-style' visiting was mentioned as a successful approach for face-to-face visits.

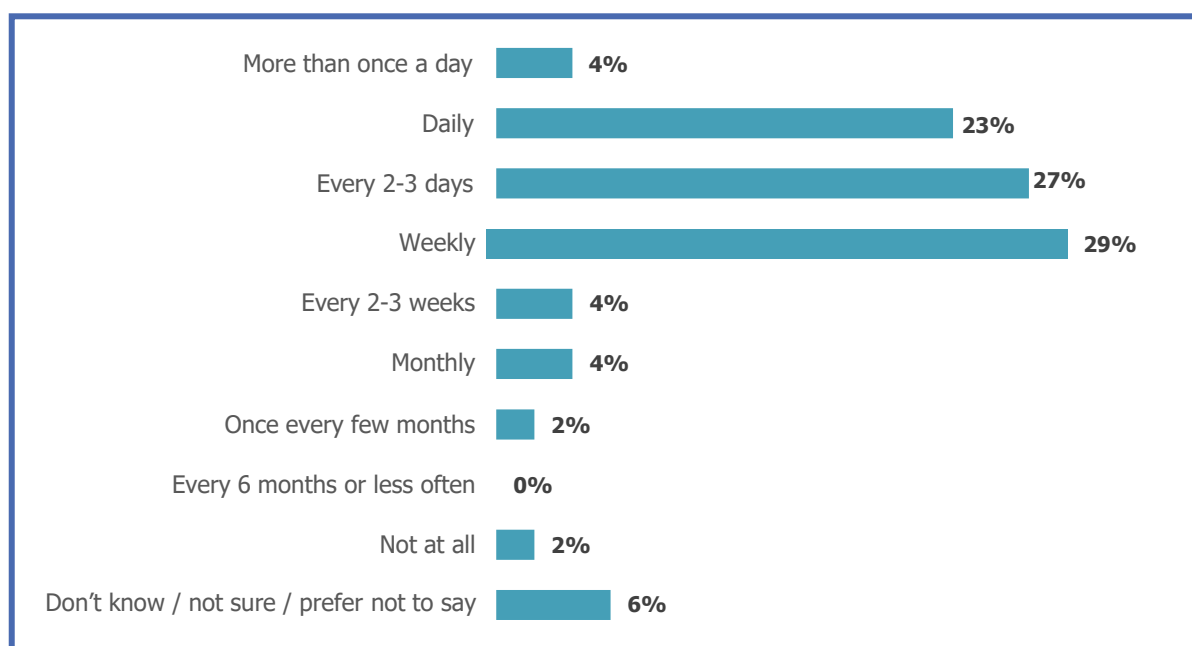
RELATIVES

The majority of relatives reported window visits being possible during the last year and three in four participated in them, but only two in five relatives stated that video calls were possible and they were used by even fewer. Contact was generally seen as having a positive impact on residents' wellbeing, but there has

not been enough of it - less than a third felt like they have been able to contact their loved one as much as they would like. Overall, three in four were positive about the efforts of the care home with respect to facilitating contact, but some made suggestions for better shelter during window visits and better organisation of lateral flow testing.

Figure 3: Before the COVID-19 pandemic, how often did you visit your relative/friend in the care home?

RELATIVES



BASE: RELATIVES whose family member had lived in care home for more than a year (52)

Before the pandemic, which brought about visiting restrictions, relatives were visiting their family members in the care home often, with over a quarter going daily or more than once a day [27%]. This rises to over half of relatives, when including those who visited every 3 days or more often [54%], whilst two in five visited weekly or less often [40%].

Figure 4: Visiting/contact type summary

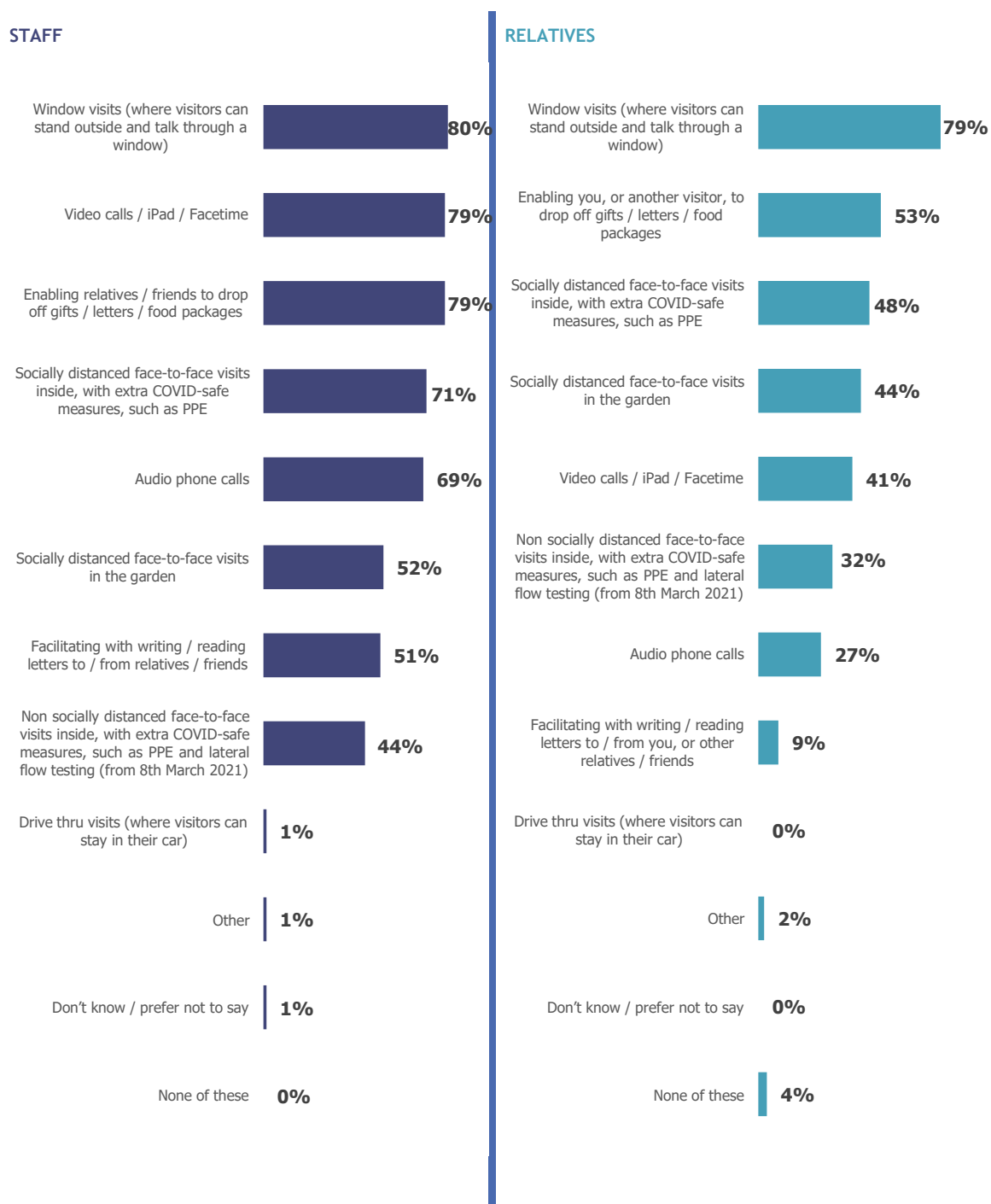
TOTAL	STAFF	RELATIVES
IN-PERSON VISITS	97%	95%
AUDIO / VIDEO CALLS	85%	48%
GIFTS / LETTERS	81%	54%

BASE: STAFF (75); RELATIVES (81)

The most commonly offered visit/contact type was window visits, with four in five staff members, and four in five relatives mentioning that they were possible at their care home [80%; 79%]. A similar proportion of staff also mentioned that video calls were possible, and that their visitors were allowed to drop off gift packages [79%; 79%].

However, there's a discrepancy between the two profiles, as only two in five relatives believed their care home enabled video calls [41%], and just over a half thought they could drop off a gift [53%]. The summary table above further highlights the differences in what forms of contact staff claim has been made possible, and what relatives believe to be possible - potential evidence of a communication issue between care homes and visitors.

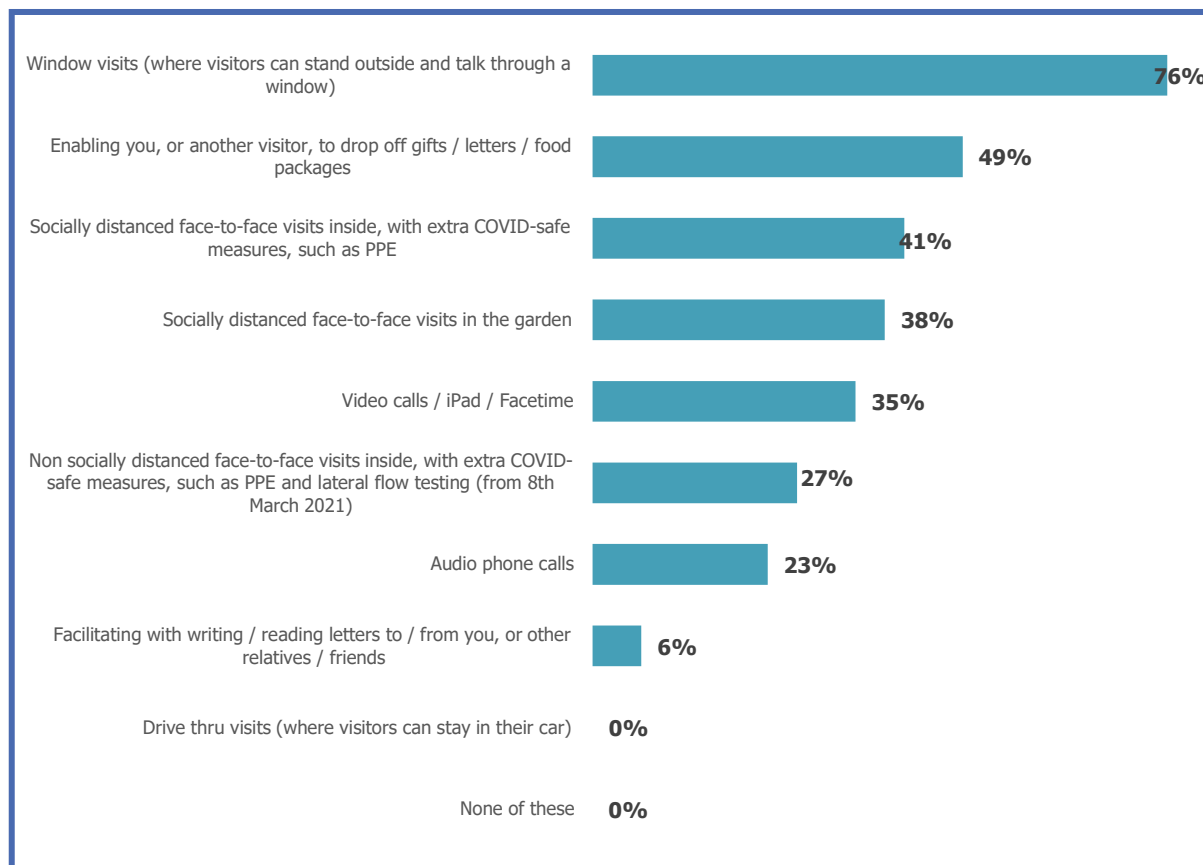
Figure 5: During the pandemic which, if any, of the following types of visiting/contact has the care home made possible? Please select all that apply.



BASE: STAFF (75); RELATIVES (81)

Figure 6: And which of those types of visiting/contact have you taken part in? Please select all that apply.

RELATIVES



BASE: RELATIVES who said visits were made possible (78)

Qualitative overview

Qualitatively, staff recalled trying their hardest to facilitate visiting, within the context of changing government restrictions; and contact with family members always remained a priority. ‘Pod-style visiting’ where visitors remain in an enclosed see-through ‘pod’ was repeatedly mentioned as a successful alternative to face-to-face visits.

“Staff have still allowed family and friends to come and visit our residents, whether this is in the garden socially distanced or through a window, we have even had a new room for pod visits”

Senior Care Assistant, 18-24, female

“During the pandemic staff worked throughout making sure residents were happy and contented and that they always spoke to families.”

Deputy Manager, 50-64, female

Generally, relatives understand the difficulties faced by care homes, and appreciate when they have made quick responses to changing government guidance. Some feel provisions should have been made to better shelter visitors from the weather while on window or garden visits.

Others feel more structure and organisation would improve the face-to-face visits since the implementation of lateral flow testing, to avoid missing out on valuable time with loved ones.

“It has been very difficult emotionally not being able to have real contact but window visits have helped”

Relative, 65-79, male

“Care home has made access via window visit very accessible while not able to hug, being able to visit has minimised the emotional impact upon myself. Knowing he is safe and cared for.”

Relative, 50-64, male

“The inability to hug/hold hands was very frustrating, but the video sessions are held regularly throughout the pandemic and these are appreciated.”

Relative, 50-64, male

“The pod visiting is excellent and easy to book.”

Relative, 50-64, male

“Felt more could have been done quicker with the window visits especially when winter was approaching and you’re sitting in the freezing cold or rain”

Relative, 50-64, female

“I was told early last year that facilities would be made for garden visits. I was always told it will be available in a couple of weeks but they never happened.”

Relative, 50-64, male

“I have been able to visit via window, pod, and more recently in-house, and whilst unable I have been able to conduct zoom calls which were positive”

Relative, 50-64, male

“I feel when visits come round there is no organisation with the lateral flow test. I was told to arrive at least 30 minutes early for my test, which got done

15 minutes late, then when I got in someone was already still sitting there with their relative. So my visit only lasted 4 minutes.”

Relative, prefer not to say

Satisfaction with and perceptions of activities

STAFF

The vast majority of staff said that activities for residents were facilitated during the pandemic. These were mostly activities such as colouring in, crosswords or knitting, but spending time outside in the garden was also widely reported. Nine in ten staff believed the activities had a positive impact on residents’ emotional wellbeing.

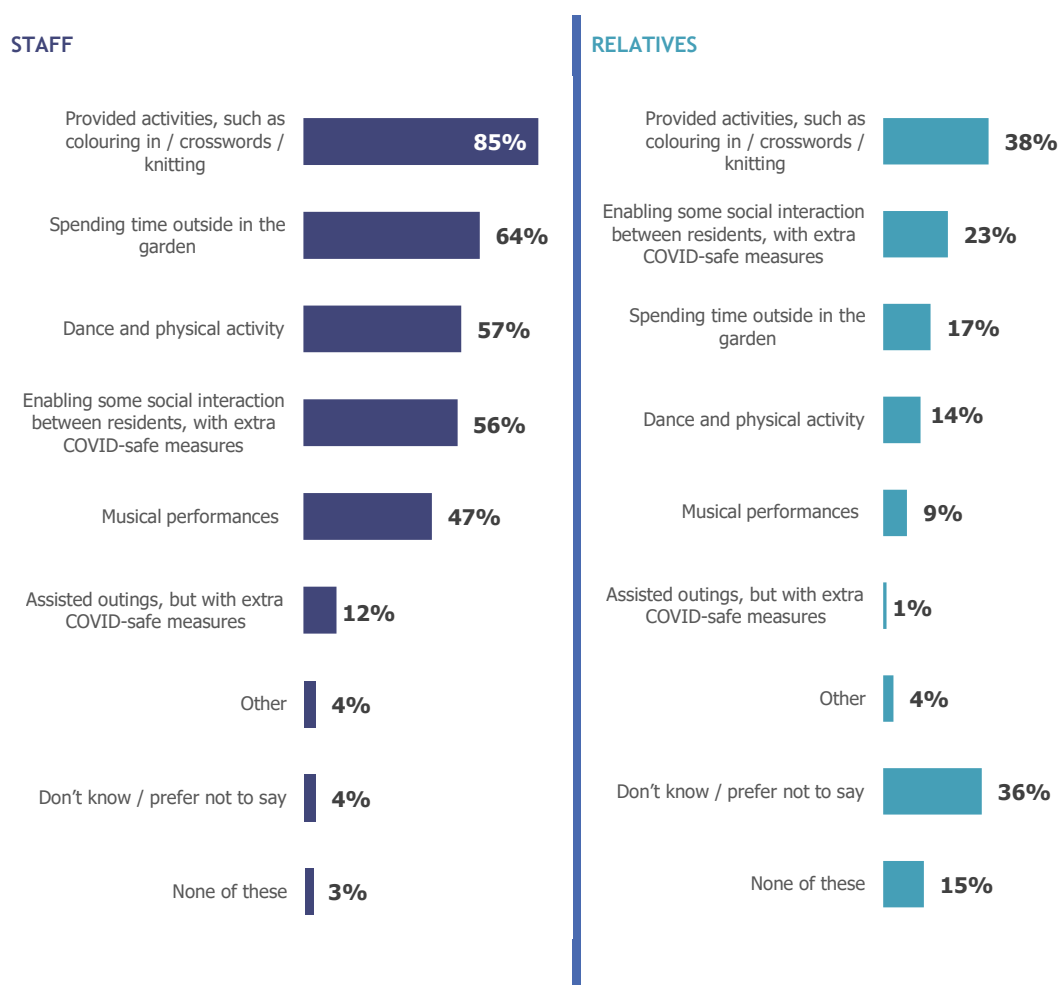
Fewer than three in ten said residents’ complex needs have been taken into account when designing activities. The majority said that their care home employs an activities coordinator. Overall, seven in ten staff rated the efforts of their care home positively with respect to providing activities - some mentioned activities such as cookery, gardening, pamper sessions and singalongs, but others called for more variety.

RELATIVES

A significant proportion of relatives did not know about the provision of activities during the pandemic, and one in seven said there were none. Those who did say there were activities were mostly positive on the impact these had on residents’ emotional wellbeing. However, only half rated the care homes’ efforts positively, and some told of stories where their loved ones had been left isolated in their bedrooms, with no activities.

Figure 7: During the pandemic which, if any, of the following activities has the care home facilitated? Please select all that apply. [STAFF]

During the pandemic which, if any, of the following activities has the care home provided for your friend/relative? Please select all that apply. [RELATIVES]



BASE: STAFF (75); RELATIVES (81)

Five in six staff reported providing activities for residents such as colouring in, crosswords or knitting [85%]. On the contrary, less than half as many relatives reported their loved one having access to these activities [38%].

A similar pattern can be seen for many of the other listed activities, for example, 64% of staff said their care home facilitated spending time in the garden, but only 17% of relatives said this. Notably, over a third of relatives say they 'don't know' what activities were on offer [36%].

These findings paint the picture that relatives have a lack of understanding of the breadth of activities that care homes have been providing for residents, and a potential lack of communication from the care home about these activities.

Qualitative overview

Qualitatively, the review by staff is mixed, possibly based on variations in provisions between care homes. Some proudly refer to activities such as cookery, gardening, pamper sessions and singalongs, but others call for more variety. Outdoor facilities for residents to shelter in gardens during colder weather would enable more garden-based activities.

"Everyone has pulled together to ensure the service users are kept stimulated, their mobility continues, where possible, and done everything possible to keep both staff and service users safe and well at all times, including engaging in singalongs, games, pamper sessions, and uplifted positive attitudes from staff at all times."

Senior Care Assistant, 50-64, female

"Activities have been arranged and all have been involved or asked to be involved"

Deputy Manager, 25-49, female

"More could have been put into the residents such as activities etc."

Care Assistant, 25-49, female

"Perhaps a more sheltered seating area in garden so that residents are able to keep warm and dry and use our outside space regardless of the weather."

Activities Coordinator, 50-64, female

"More music!"

Catering/Kitchen Assistant, 50-64, male

Some relatives tell of how their loved ones have been left isolated in their bedrooms, with no activities to keep them stimulated. But this is not the case for all, clearly some care homes went above and beyond to provide for their residents over the course of the pandemic.

One relative commented on the care home hosting a birthday celebration for their loved one. More outdoor access, both in the garden and out and about in the local area has been suggested.

"They've been left on their own a lot, in their room. No activities"

Relative, 50-64, female

"Left residents in their own rooms with no stimulation. They only allowed 3 or 4 in dining room at a time and didn't allow residents to sit together. They were not getting residents dressed as no one going in."

Relative, 50-64, female

"We are content that they do as much as they can during very busy times. Would hopefully like to see an outing somewhere local and believe that once restrictions are lifted it will be possible."

Relative, 65-79, male

"Allow garden access as had no fresh air in over a year"

Relative, 65-79, female

Satisfaction with and perceptions of care home communication

STAFF

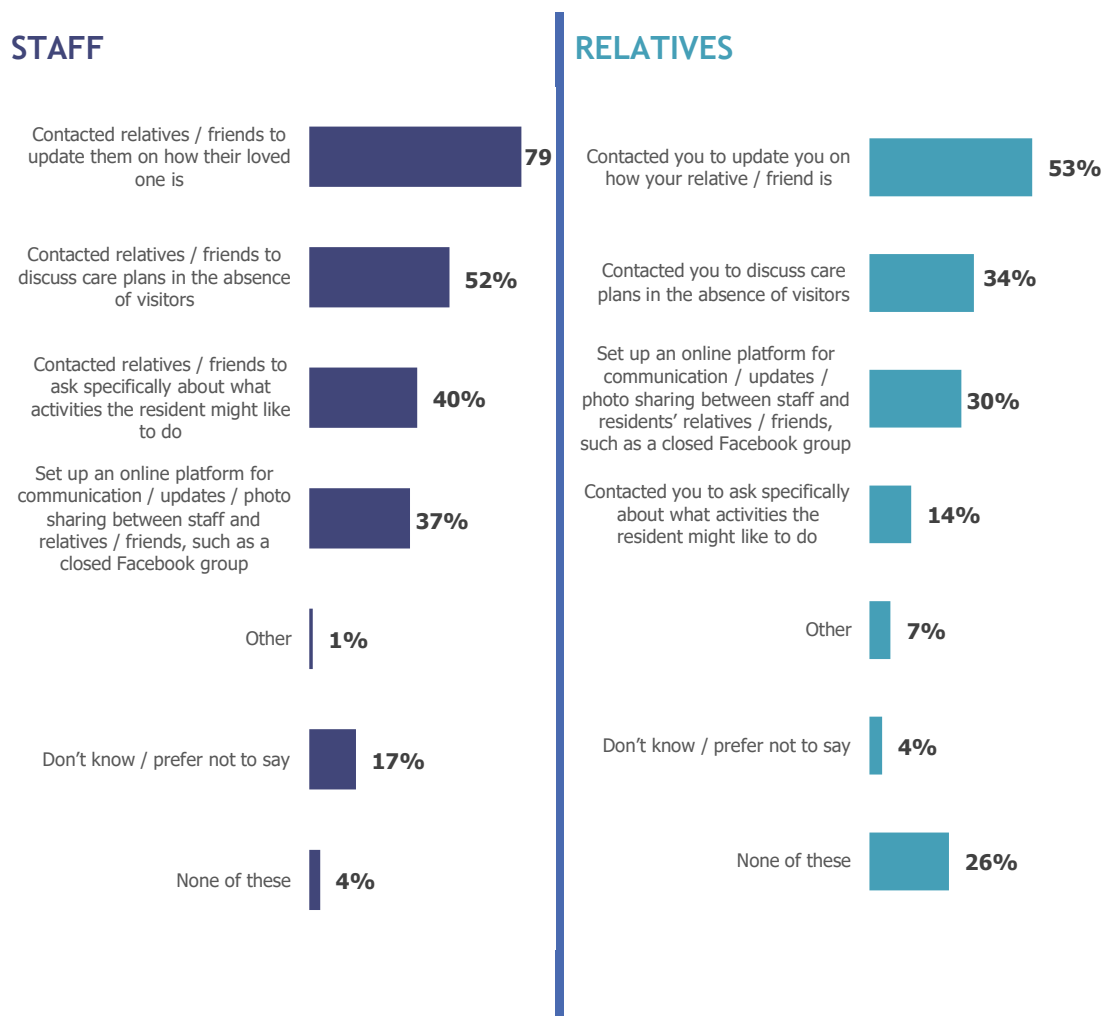
Four in five staff recalled their care home making contact with relatives to update them on how their loved one was, and two in five stated that relatives were contacted specifically about what residents might like to do. The large majority of staff felt that they have managed to keep relatives up to date about residents' health and wellbeing and it has been easy to get in touch with relatives during the pandemic. Overall, staff were very positive about the efforts of the care home at communicating with relatives and friends - over half say communication was excellent.

RELATIVES

Half of the relatives recalled their care home getting in touch to update them on how their loved one was, and one in seven recalled being contacted specifically

about what their loved one might like to do. The majority feel they have been kept up to date about their relative’s health and wellbeing, but a notable minority feel they have not been updated as much as they would like, although it has been easy to get in touch with the care home should it be necessary. One in five relatives said the care home’s communication was either not very good or poor, but the majority were positive. Comments were mostly about providing more regular communication.

Figure 8: During the pandemic which, if any, of the following has the care home done? Please select all that apply.



BASE: STAFF (75); RELATIVES who are primary contacts (74)

Four in five staff say their care home has been making contact with relatives to update them on how their loved one is [79%]. This compares to only half of relatives saying they have been contacted with an update [53%].

A similar discrepancy in proportions can be seen for many of the communications listed, for example, two in five staff state that relatives were contacted specifically about what residents might like to do [40%], whereas only one in seven relatives received such a call [14%].

A notable proportion - one quarter of relatives stated that none of the communications listed were undertaken during the pandemic [26%].

Qualitative overview

As with the quantitative findings, staff are positive about care home communications. The feedback from relatives is also consistent with the above data - generally relatives would like to see improved and more regular communication from the care homes.

“Staff are amazing, always reassuring residents and keeping them safe, also keeping families and friends up to date with changes”

Care Assistant, 50-64, female

“I have been able to easily contact the care home. They have had so much to do during Covid. They have always responded to my questions and when window visits and in home visits reinstated, they accommodated my requests really well. They understand my relative and her needs.”

Relative, 50-64, female

“When speaking to the staff, their dedication shines through, especially as they've been separated from their own families. They always make time to speak to me whenever I ring.”

Relative, 50-64, female

“Good communication on covid status, vaccination and visiting procedures.”

Relative, 65-79, male

“Updates have been fantastic keeping everyone informed. Really appreciate all the hard work from the company”

Relative, 50-64, female

"I have feelings of anxiety because I'm unaware of normal care home practices and procedures as they were admitted during the pandemic."

Relative, 50-64, female

"Frustratingly poor communication"

Relative, 50-64, female

"No contact with relatives, didn't know what was happening - not even told first-hand about covid outbreaks. Not asked at all about how I would like the resident cared for, or what was best"

Relative, 50-64, female

The impact of the pandemic on residents' and relatives' emotional wellbeing

STAFF

Over one third of staff reported residents' emotional wellbeing as being worse than before the pandemic. The reasons noted included the lack of visitors and lack of physical contact, and the knock-on impacts of these, such as confusion as to why family had not visited recently; low mood; anxiety; loneliness; becoming withdrawn; and reduced food and fluid intake. Quantitatively, two in five staff witnessed a worsening of conditions like Alzheimer's or dementia which they felt was due to the pandemic. Notable proportions of staff also noticed physical changes such as changing eating habits and deterioration in mobility. Mentally, loneliness was most commonly observed - by almost two thirds of staff, and many also noticed residents experiencing depression or anxiety.

RELATIVES

Half of relatives felt that residents' emotional wellbeing as being worse than before the pandemic. Relatives qualitatively cited reduction in overall contact, as well as stimulation, as exacerbating the decline in emotional wellbeing, and

some mentioned having noticed deterioration in dementia; deterioration in physical appearance; memory loss; weight loss; deterioration in ability to communicate; and depression. Quantitatively, almost half of relatives witnessed a worsening of conditions like Alzheimer's or dementia, which they attributed to the pandemic. Almost one in three noticed a change in eating habits or a deterioration in mobility. Loneliness, depression or anxiety were observed by over a half of relatives, brought about either partially or fully by the impacts of the pandemic.

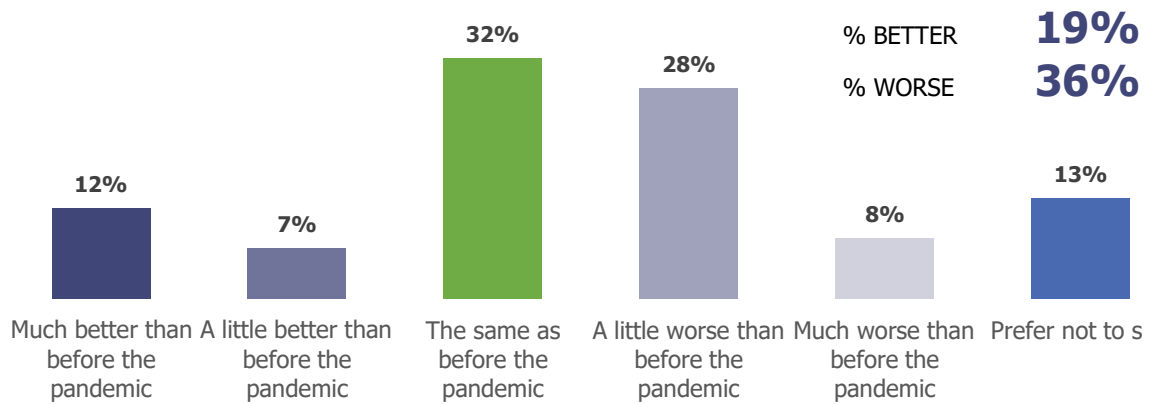
Relatives of care home residents themselves have felt the impacts of the isolation and the inability to visit their loved ones to a great extent, and use words such as 'stressful', 'difficult', 'excruciating', 'heart-breaking' and 'devastating' to describe the past year, and the lack of contact with loved ones.

Guilt was also a common emotion, highlighted by the fact that almost all relatives agreed that under normal circumstances, with no visiting restrictions, providing love and comfort was their role as the relative of a resident in a care home, and that this is something they felt they have not been able to provide.

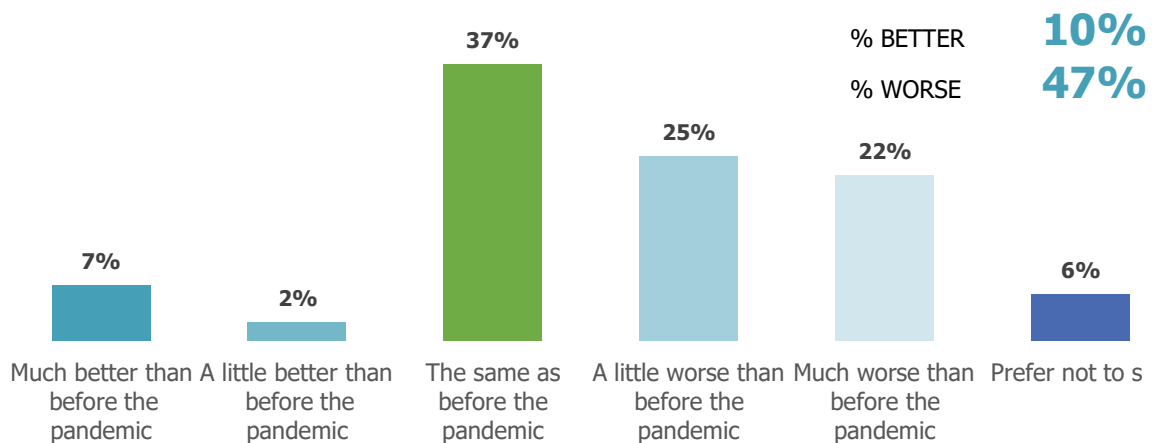
Figure 9: Generally, how would you describe the emotional wellbeing of the residents right now, in comparison to before the pandemic? [STAFF]

How would you describe your relative/friend’s emotional wellbeing right now in comparison to before the pandemic? [RELATIVES]

STAFF



RELATIVES



BASE: STAFF (75); RELATIVES (81)

Over one third of staff and almost a half of relatives report residents’ emotional wellbeing as being worse than before the pandemic [36%; 47%]. A much smaller proportion of staff and relatives have observed residents’ wellbeing improving - two in five and one in ten respectively [19%; 10%].

This question was asked very similarly by Healthwatch Leeds, and reported on in their care home Report in June 2020 [pg. 3]. Their staff and relatives sample revealed a comparable proportion of roughly a half of respondents reporting a worsening of residents' emotional wellbeing whilst living in a Leeds care home during the pandemic [51%, base: (39)].

Qualitative perspective

Participants who said residents' emotional wellbeing was 'a little better' or 'much better' were asked why they thought this was. The staff believed that the emotional wellbeing of residents significantly improved with the relaxations of visiting restrictions. Relatives acknowledged the hard work of the care home staff in keeping their loved ones feeling comfortable and happy.

"Residents are now able to do activities together and see family and loved ones which has made them a lot more happier"

Care Assistant, 25-49, female

"We have been fortunate in that Mum regards some of the staff as part of the family. This has been very reassuring, and speaks volumes of their attention, dedication and commitment"

Relative, 50-64, male

"My mam has had a lot of attention, the staff have worked so hard, this time last year my mam was knocking on death's door, since she's been in XXX [care home name] she has put on weight"

Relative, 50-64, female

In direct comparison, staff who said 'a little worse' or 'much worse' noted the lack of visitors, and lack of physical contact, and saw the knock-on impacts of these as the contributing factors. The impacts suggested included confusion as to why family had not visited recently; low mood; anxiety; loneliness; becoming withdrawn; and reduced food and fluid intake.

"The residents didn't understand why family could not visit even though it was explained on a number of occasions"

Care Assistant, 25-49, female

"Become withdrawn, missing family, low mood poor food and fluid intake."

Senior Care Assistant, 25-49, male

Relatives also cite reduction in overall contact, as well as stimulation, as exacerbating the worsening of emotional wellbeing over the course of the pandemic. Relatives have noticed deterioration in dementia; deterioration in physical appearance; memory loss; weight loss; deterioration in ability to communicate; and depression.

"Her mental health has deteriorated to the point of not recognising me on first visit indoors. Physical appearance has also deteriorated - lack of hairdressing is the main problem."

Relative, 65-79, female

"Lack of contact with her family has had a negative impact on her emotional state - she is tearful and feels slightly cut off despite great work from care home staff"

Relative, 50-64, male

"She became very depressed during the first lockdown simply because no contact was allowed, and she missed her family terribly. Her dementia has changed which could be a result"

Relative, 50-64, female

"My Mother has Alzheimer's and she has been getting progressively worse. Since the pandemic she has had no visitors other than me, for a very short visit, on only 2 occasions."

Relative, 50-64, female.

COVID-19 infection

STAFF

In the last 12 months almost half of the staff have tested positive for COVID-19, and four in five have been aware of an outbreak at their workplace. The vast majority have had at least the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, but there are almost one in ten staff members who say they have refused it.

RELATIVES

A small proportion of relatives said their loved one moved into their care home during the pandemic. Of those people, 7% had a relative who was moved in after

having or testing positive with COVID-19 in hospital. Overall, in the last year, one quarter of relatives said that their loved one in care tested positive for COVID-19, whilst three quarters were aware of an outbreak in the care home. Almost all relatives said that their loved one had received at least the first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine.

Satisfaction with and perceptions of the handling of care

STAFF

Four in five staff said that they have taken on more of a companionship role; engaged in more one-to-one support; and taken the time to learn more about each resident, since visitors have been limited during the pandemic. A smaller but significant proportion of staff said that care tasks that are usually carried out by relatives are now being carried out by staff. Confidence in the care homes' ability to deliver the best care possible; in the care homes' ability to prevent the pandemic's impacts on the wellbeing of residents; and residents being safe in the care home was very high among staff. Overall, the care homes have been well-rated by staff, for the way they have handled the challenges of the pandemic. Qualitatively, staff explained how hard they have worked in the face of the pandemic, and were mostly positive about management and support, given the everchanging restrictions, but some did mention management issues.

RELATIVES

Relatives of those who moved into their care home during the pandemic are generally satisfied with the admission experience. Three in five relatives agreed that staff have taken on more of a companionship role, and around a half agreed that staff engaged in more one-to-one support; and had taken the time to learn more about each resident since visitors were limited.

Seven in ten relatives said that care tasks that are usually carried out by relatives are now being carried out by staff. Confidence in the care homes' ability to

prevent the pandemic's impacts on the wellbeing of residents; and confidence that residents are safe in the care home was high among relatives.

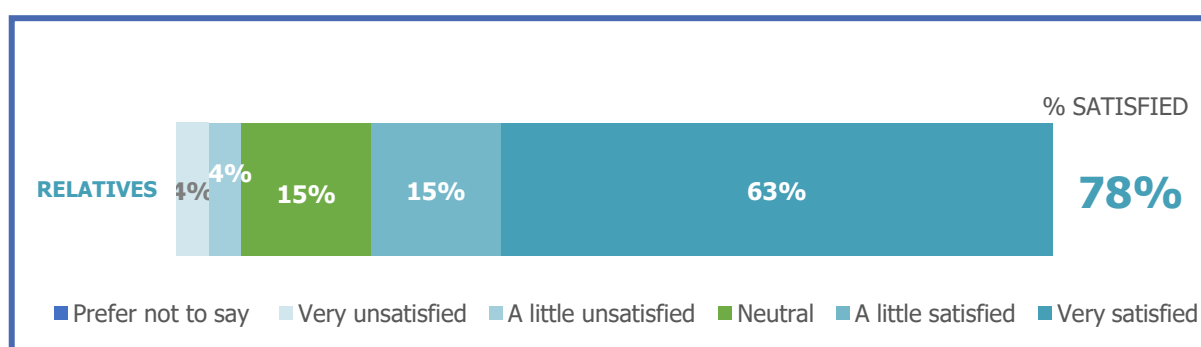
Not as high was the confidence that the care home was delivering the best care possible. Roughly one in five relatives have questioned whether the care home is the best place for their loved one to be during the pandemic.

For comparison, those who could comment on the standard of care delivered by their care home before the pandemic, generally rated the care averagely, with seven in ten relatives giving a score of either 5 or 6 out of 10, and no one giving a 'high' score of 9 or 10 out of 10.

However, when rating the care delivered since the pandemic, four in five relatives rated the care positively with a score of 7-10 out of 10, suggesting the standard of care actually improved. The rating for the handling of the pandemic's challenges revealed that just over a half of relatives felt their care homes deserved a score of 9 or 10 out of 10.

Qualitatively, relatives praised the care home staff and thanked them for their efforts over the past year. However, management issues arose, particularly with the repeated mention of understaffing.

Figure 10: You said earlier that your relative/friend moved into the care home within the last year. How satisfied are you that the care home did as much as they could to make the admission experience a good one for your relative/friend?



BASE: RELATIVES whose relative has been in the Care home for less than a year (27) LOW BASE*

Relatives of those who moved into their care home during the pandemic are generally satisfied with the admission experience. Four in five said they were either a little satisfied or very satisfied that the care home did as much as they could to make the experience a good one for their loved one [78%], and three in five were very satisfied [63%].

Qualitative overview

Qualitatively, staff evidence their high rating score by explaining how hard they have worked in the face of the pandemic. Staff are mostly positive about management and support, given the everchanging restrictions, but some do mention management issues.

"We have worked very hard as a team to keep our care home residents safe and free from COVID-19 throughout the pandemic"

Manager, 50-64, female

"The management have explained all of the guidance at every stage, and have drilled it in about PPE, testing and been supportive. The team has worked together and given over 100% to the residents. The activities lady has ensured all service users have kept in touch with their families."

Care Assistant, 25-49, female

All staff have pulled together and made the extra effort for each other, the home and the residents. The manager has made sure we have been informed of any changes or updates on COVID throughout. Everybody has been so supportive the past year and continues to be supportive now.

Senior Care Assistant, 25-49, female

"In terms of staff I would say excellent as we have had to deal with extra pressures but in terms of the company/management I would rate 0. Residents and staff have had hardly any support regarding changes."

Care Assistant, 25-49, female

"Overall could have been handled better from start"

Care Assistant, 50-64, female

Relatives have mostly used this opportunity to praise the care home staff and

thank them for their efforts over the past year. However, management issues have arisen, particularly with the repeated mention of understaffing.

Others have shared their disappointment with the admission of Covid patients early on in the pandemic, and there are some calls for better monitoring of personal grooming.

"I understand why visiting restrictions are in place, and due to my Mother's Alzheimer's condition I am content and satisfied that she is receiving the best care possible."

Relative, 50-64, male

"In my opinion XXX [care home name] staff are excellent and with the challenges posed by the pandemic and by my mother with her advanced Alzheimer's have always been very caring, patient, understanding and have dealt with any issues in the most professional way. Food is very important to her and the standard of the food and cakes and snacks excellent."

Relative, 50-64, female

"I can now rest assured knowing my relative is being well looked after and all her needs are being met by very caring and professional staff."

Relative, 50-64, female

"It has been a very worrying time and I have been anxious about visiting the care home but I have appreciated the support of staff and their guidance"

Relative, 50-64, male

"The care home does their best but they are understaffed. When I go for my in-house visits I can see the staff are very caring people who take pride in their work, but they are clearly rushed off their feet."

Relative, 25-49, female

"The care home ought to have employed more staff as the ratio 8 residents to 1 staff is unacceptable given the exceptional circumstances"

Relative, 50-64, female

"I think due to understaffing residents have not received the care they should have - I had to personally ring an ambulance for my nana when she had coronavirus because the care home didn't. She came out of hospital with an infection and covid and the care home forgot for 4 days to give her antibiotics"

Relative, 25-49, female

"I'm constantly worried about my relative, she's just left in her room & no social interaction even has meals in her room now. We are paying nearly £900 per week for this it's disgraceful"

Relative, 50-64, female

"Felt that they (management) dealt with it really poorly at the beginning. The home taking in the overflow of COVID patients from South Tyneside Hospital was also a disaster in that most of the residents contracted the virus, resulting in deaths and care workers getting infected!!"

Relative, 50-64, male

Final thoughts

Clearly this has been an extremely difficult year for care home residents, relatives, and staff. The troubling impacts of the pandemic and restricted visiting are evidenced in this research, despite the indication that care homes have put a lot of effort into adapting the care that they give to meet both everchanging government guidance, and the needs of their residents and visitors.

The mental and physical impacts of the pandemic are definite and tangible, evidenced by both staff and relatives' accounts. The greatest effects on residents have been seen in the deterioration of mental state, particularly for those with Alzheimer's or dementia, and an increase in loneliness. 'COVID-safe' visits and activities have gone some way towards mitigating these impacts, but clearly nothing can completely substitute regular close contact with loved ones.

In the absence of 'normal' visiting, communications have become more important than ever this past year, and although most staff feel the level and quality of care home communication has been good, a proportion of relatives do feel it needs some improvement.

Overall, staff feel they have tried their best and done a good job. Most relatives agree, although there is generally a discrepancy in the level of positivity between

staff and relatives when reflecting on the way the challenges of the pandemic have been handled. However, many relatives have taken the opportunity given in the survey to share their thanks and praise.

In some cases, perceived quality of care has actually seen an improvement on pre-pandemic levels - a testament to the dedication and efforts of all staff involved.



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