

Providing care in the homes of the elderly can be a rewarding role, however it can be hard for carers to deal with the passing of service users.

This carer provides care in the service user's home, mainly for private, elderly clients and works for a long established local service provider. Her responsibilities are considerable and demanding, especially considering the time constrictions that she faces and these include cooking, personal care, dressing, cleaning and medication administration. This carer is in the industry due to love of the work and compassion and decided to pursue this career as she found it more appealing than becoming a nurse, which was her initial intention.

Despite her passion, insufficient pay is a considerable downside to her job, this is exacerbated by the fact that she is only paid for when she is at a service user's home. This is further complicated by the fact that she is expected to only take five minutes when travelling between jobs, this is often impossible to do or she may get stuck in traffic. Twenty five minutes per job is allocated by her employer and this is often not enough time for her to complete all of the tasks necessary. Flexibility is necessary, as carers are often delayed by patients' most urgent of needs, using the bathroom for example, this is an unnecessary cause of stress for her.

"If everyone could just have an extra 15 minutes... You know you'd be sorted but they are so tight on how long you are allocated to each person you know they are only allowed so many hours in a week"

This carer enjoys the fact that she is helping service users to stay at home and maintain their independence, which is usually what they want. Although she has worked in a home and appreciates their necessity, she feels that until recently, many people were put in homes that did not need to be there, but now there is more focus on the community based approach. This carer enjoys the fact that the people who know of her work value it, especially the service user and their families. This is because she takes a lot of pressure off the families and they appreciate this. She also feels valued by hospital staff and social services as they decrease pressure on their organisations by taking care of people in their own homes.

She feels that her organisation values her opinion and has the chance to voice her opinion on anything at an annual appraisal and can get in touch with management if she has a problem. Her career progression has been affected by her time off for her three children; she has received promotions but has also returned to work at a lower level due to personal commitments, vacant job positions in her organisation are usually advertised internally before externally to encourage progression within the industry. Yet there are not many opportunities for progression and these often only arise when someone leaves, reaching management levels is difficult due to the usually small management teams.

Training is identified to be important although she doubts whether people can be trained to be patient or compassionate which she perceives to be core skills in the industry. Basic life skills, such as cooking are necessary to be taught as young carers coming straight out of school may need even basic tasks explaining to them. The more life experience of their own a carer has, the more skilful they tend to be at their job. The most useful qualification that this carer has gained has been the NVQ level 2 which was very practical as opposed to a more paper based, managerial level 3. The motivation for carers to become more qualified can be related to pay incentives from their employers. However training has the capacity to improve the lives of the carer, training in palliative care is becoming more prevalent as more people decide to go home as opposed to a hospice in shorter term cases and this can be difficult for the carer to cope with.

"We have support from Marie Curie and what not who come in as well alongside us but none of us have actually really been trained for palliative you know. It's quite hard you know it's quite hard to watch someone waste away"