

Serious failings may have shortened mother's life

Investigation finds that care home's failings were preventable

The Chief Executive of Conway Group Healthcare has apologised to a resident's family after our investigation found serious failings in her care.

The resident's daughter complained to us about two separate incidents in The Cottage Care Home, Coleraine, which is owned by Conway Group Healthcare. The complainant considered the care her mother received was '*seriously inadequate and totally unsatisfactory.*'

In one incident her mother sustained a fractured leg while being moved by staff. In the other she claimed that poor oral health care led to a delay in finding her mother's dentures lodged in her throat.

After a detailed investigation it was found that not enough care was taken while the resident was being helped to move from her bed to her chair. During the manoeuvre to assist the resident her foot became caught in the bedrail. Despite this and an indication the resident experienced pain, staff continued with the manoeuvre

After the resident was in the chair, staff checked for injury, however this was not carried out properly and resulted in a full day's delay in the identification of a fracture.

Our investigation established that the complainant's mother's dentures were lodged in her throat for up to 24 hours undetected. We found this was due to no oral health care plan as well as a failure to have a clear oral health care policy.

The resident experienced swallowing and breathing difficulties, and we were critical that the home did not recognise sooner the possibility that these symptoms could be related to the resident's dentures having become displaced.

Noting evidence which linked poor oral hygiene with aspiration pneumonia in elderly people, we concluded that the incidents caused the resident to suffer a significant degree of pain and discomfort.

We found on balance that the home's failings in the care and treatment of the resident were preventable, and that the incidents may well have contributed to the shortening of her life.

Commenting on the case, Ombudsman Margaret Kelly said:

"It is clear that the resident's daughter and her two brothers were devoted to their mother and very much involved in decisions regarding her care. The trauma and

distress of losing her in the circumstances reflected in this report was evident in their correspondence to the home and to my Office.

I understand that this report will have made distressing reading and I recognise the emotional impact on a family in bringing a complaint of this nature forward. It is a testament to the love and devotion they had for their mother that they want to ensure no other family suffers a similar experience.”

As well as recommending the apology, we also asked the home to carry out staff training and service improvements in oral hygiene, and in the moving and handling of elderly residents.

Conway Group Healthcare accepted our recommendations.