

Ombudsman concerned at serious failings in nursing home

The daughter of a 65-year-old care home resident with advanced Multiple Sclerosis asked us to investigate her concerns about the care provided to her father by Dunlarg Care Home, County Armagh while it was under the ownership of Four Seasons Healthcare.

She also questioned the honesty of the home's responses to the issues she raised.

The resident went into full-time care at the home in March 2017 and was admitted to Craigavon Area Hospital in January 2018 with a suspected stroke and oral thrush. He sadly passed away in February 2018.

His daughter felt the deterioration in her father's health was due the home's failure to look after him properly. She said it failed to follow his care plan by not giving him adequate personal and oral hygiene, and by not properly managing his pressure wounds. She also complained that it failed to follow medical guidance and call an ambulance when he showed symptoms consistent with a stroke.

Our investigation found that the patient developed pressure sores due to the failure of the home to consistently reposition him every two hours. It was also established that the home failed to follow guidance from the physiotherapist to prevent limb contractures. The home stopped providing regular showers to the resident due to the risk of further skin damage, which we considered was an appropriate action.

Our investigation uncovered serious systemic failures in record keeping by the home. The failings included, but were not limited to, failure to keep records of the resident's wishes, creating false records, failure to document a deterioration in his oral health, and repetitive cutting and pasting of entries in the daily care notes. The home was also responsible for losing, or mislaying, records containing other evidence of the resident's nursing care. Given the importance of accurate records in the delivery of health and social care, and in ensuring confidence in our care system, we found these failings alarming.

When the resident showed signs of a stroke, our investigation concluded that the home should have called an ambulance immediately. In addition, we found that there was some justification to the complainant's claims about the honesty of the home's response to questions about this issue.

As well as recommending an apology to the complainant, we made eight further recommendations in an action plan to improve services and to prevent future reoccurrence of the failings identified.

The current owners, Healthcare Ireland, agreed to implement these recommendations. We noted with concern that the owners of the Home at the time of the incident, Four Seasons Healthcare, did not provide a response, either to our findings or our recommendations.