



ARCBITE



Brokering Innovation Through Evidence

Are we allowed to visit now? Concerns and issues surrounding vaccination and infection risks in UK care homes during COVID-19

Background

This study provides first findings on care home visitation in the light of vaccination and testing. 10,000 care home residents have died from COVID-19 and research into the effect of the pandemic upon residents; family carers and staff has been limited. Vaccine hesitancy by care home staff has been evidenced in a survey (Tulloch). Lack of social engagement in the care home setting has had a detrimental impact upon residents. Due to their vulnerability, care home residents; alongside social care staff have been prioritised in the vaccination rollout in the UK.

What was the aim of the project?

The aim of this study was to explore the experiences of visitors to care homes and how vaccination and testing has impacted upon the access to loved ones.

Who was involved?

University of Liverpool, Lewy Body Society, Sefton Advocacy, Lancashire & South Cumbria NHS Trust.

Thank you to the ARC NWC staff, public advisers and the representatives from named organisations in making this research happen.

What did we do?

We interviewed by phone or online family carers of relatives with dementia who were residing in a care home as well as care home staff. These two groups were interviewed in October 2020 with follow-up interviews in March 2021 when vaccinations were ongoing and restrictions were lifted.

The interview topic guides for the first and follow-up interviews were co-produced with clinicians, unpaid carers of people living with dementia and academics. Two research teams coded each transcript and meetings then took place to discuss these themes.



How did we involve people?

We collected basic demographic characteristics of 26 family carers including age, gender, ethnicity, as well as their relationship with the relative with dementia and dementia subtype. For the 16 care staff we collected their years of working in the care home sector, staff role, and size of the care homes they were employed in.

In the October baseline interviews, participants were asked about changes to their caring roles since the pandemic, their experiences of viral testing and COVID-19 safety measures employed in the care home, resident visits and communications between family members the care home, and the impact of the restrictions on the staff and residents. The March follow-up involved 11 family carers and 9 care home staff. Interview questions centered on changes to participants' experiences and restriction impacts over time, and included further questions about their experiences of and views about COVID-19 vaccination and vaccine uptake in care home residents and staff and for themselves as carers.

What we found and what does this mean?

- (1) Delayed and inconsistent offers of face-to-face visits for family and friends.
- (2) Procedures and facilitation of visits;
- (3) Variable uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine by care staff.
- (4) Misinformation, education, and free choice angering families.
- (5) Frustration and anger in family carers due total inability to change the individual care homes management.

What next?

Influence legislation so that in another pandemic all care homes would need to operate in the same way and all staff would be vaccinated.

What is NIHR ARC North West Coast?

The Applied Research Collaboration North West Coast (ARC NWC) superseded CLAHRC NWC in September 2019. It is a partnership between universities, NHS, public, local authorities etc. Its mission is to undertake applied research to improve public health, wellbeing, quality of care & reduce health inequalities across the North West Coast region.

<https://arc-nwc.nihr.ac.uk/>