

SPEAKING OUT!

Newsletter of the National Pensioners Convention
Minority Elders' Committee
Winter 2017/8



Improving the quality of life for all

Dr Joyce Forge, Royal College of Nursing, discusses the importance of improving the health and wellbeing of Black and minority elders

The impact of the cuts to public services, changes to welfare benefits, the underfunding of the NHS, social care, education and zero hours contracts has hit the young, women, the disabled and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) elders the hardest.

This will inevitably lead to the further erosion of standards of living and quality life, an increase in inequality in society and to disquiet among whole communities across the country.

A report by Age UK (February 2017) on the health and care of older people in England shines a light on how the system of health and care is working for older people in this country at the moment; the impact of the failure to provide it on their health and wellbeing.

The Marmot report "Fair Society, Healthy Lives" illustrated the unequal distribution of health in England. There is a clear and persistent social gradient in length of life and health (measured by disability-free life expectancy) – the lower a person's social position, the less healthy he or she is likely to be.

Inactivity increases with age. By age 75, about one in three men and one in two women engage in no physical activity at all.

Among adults aged 65 years and older, walking and gardening or yard work are, by far, the most popular physical activities.

Social support from family and friends has been consistently and positively related to regular physical activity (UK Active).

It is important to keep warm and healthy particularly at this time of year. The loss of strength and stamina attributed to ageing is in part caused by reduced physical activity.

Looking at this from a clinical nursing perspective using a whole system's view, we can carry out an assessment and suggest some prescriptions.

What is Health and Wellbeing? Health and wellbeing, is considered to be a state of



BME elders have been hit hard by the government's austerity agenda © Karishealth.com

being in alignment (body, mind and spirit). But many of us do not feel this content.

Loneliness among older people is a major concern, with 1.2m pensioners classified as chronically lonely and the problem set to get worse as the older population increases.

Our lifestyle is causing us pain, whether we are weary or anxious or overweight. We feel disconnected from others or stuck in a routine that hold no meaning. We are dissatisfied with our daily lives. We live in worry.

The good news is that – with practice, we can enhance our health and wellbeing and achieve a state of balance and contentment.

Health and wellbeing begins with the simple question – what can I do to feel happy and balanced? Asking this shifts our whole perspective – we are no longer looking to our healthcare providers or government to tell us what we need to do.

We can empower ourselves to explore what we really need and evaluate for ourselves what makes sense.

Nurses have a pivotal role to assess the needs of current and future health and social care needs that could be met by the

Local Authority, a Care Commissioning Group or the NHS.

This includes mental health, health protection and prevention, as well as wider social, economic and environmental factors that impact on health and wellbeing.

For the wider health and social care community there is a cost in resources and for nurses there is a need to understand the best evidence based intervention in prevention, treatment and management of health and well-being of the older person.

The message is that nurses have a responsibility not only to do things to help people overcome an illness or disability. We also have a responsibility to everyone in our care to support them to adopt lifestyles that will promote their health and help them avoid health problems in future.

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Winter deaths rise to 34,300

Ellen Lebethé, NPC vice president calls for action to tackle winter deaths

The NPC has called on the government to launch a new fuel poverty commission to urgently address the scale of annual winter deaths among the country's older population.

The call comes as official figures revealed an estimated 34,300 excess winter deaths occurred in England and Wales in 2016/17; the second highest number in the last five years.

Whilst the data does not break down the figures by age, the vast majority of these deaths were among people over 65.

This equates to 9720 more people dying this winter than in 2015/16 and represents a 39.5% increase.

In total, the figures represent 285 deaths a day or 11 deaths an hour.

Successive governments have



Poor housing, ill health and a low income are all factors that increase someone's risk of getting cold at winter © NPC

simply ignored the problem of winter deaths amongst the older population and seem to have a policy of crossing their fingers and hoping things will improve.

These figures show that this policy simply doesn't work – in fact things are getting worse.

Using the government's offi-

cial definition of fuel poverty, around 1.4 million older people in England are at risk and almost one in three older people live in homes with inadequate heating or insulation.

This accounts for around 3.5 million older people at risk or suffering from fuel poverty.

Pensioner poverty rises again

For the first time in twenty years, child and pensioner poverty is now on the rise, according to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

The charity found that 300,000 more pensioners are now living in relative poverty than four years ago, up to a total of 1.9m older people.

The report also argues that the housing crisis is creating a poverty time bomb for future generations of pensioners, as a decreasing proportion of the working-age population are buying their own home and in the future more older people are likely to rent and have higher housing costs in retirement.

The report came as the UK was found to have the worst state pension in the developed world, according to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Nothing in the Budget to improve social care

Millions of older people would have been dismayed at the lack of any announcements from the Chancellor in his Autumn Budget statement on 22 November, that would benefit older people.

Like many, the NPC was hoping for some further details on plans to tackle the growing crisis in social care, a programme for dealing with fuel poverty and proposals for more suitable senior housing.

Instead, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies the economy is set for lower productivity, earnings and growth until 2022.

Jan Shortt, NPC general secretary said: "The social care system has suffered over £5bn worth of cuts since 2010 and well over one million older people no longer get the help they need, staff turnover is high, the quality of care is sometimes questionable and there is a distinct lack of dignity in the sys-

tem for both staff and residents."

"A Green Paper that's been promised next summer is simply too little, too late for hundreds of thousands of older people and their families and the Chancellor should have offered something now."

Whilst not part of the Budget, figures have also confirmed that the basic state pension will rise in April by 3%, as guaranteed by the triple lock.

This will mean a full basic state pension will rise by £3.65 a week to £125.95 for a single person and by £5.85 a week to £201.45 for a couple (where a wife relies on her husband's contribution record). For millions of women this actually means an increase of just £2.20 a week on their state pension.

A detailed briefing on the Budget and older people is available at www.npcuk.org.

DWP accused of bullying over Post Office account

The NPC has accused the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) of "bullying and misleading" around 1.3 million pensioners over the way their state pensions are paid.

The NPC has seen the standard letter sent by the DWP to over 1 million Post Office Card Account (POCA) holders, which effectively tells them they can no longer have their state pension paid in this way, and should instead use a bank, building society or credit union account.

The extract from the letter reads as follows:

We are paying your pension into a Post Office Card Account. We are now asking that you use a bank, building society or credit union account. Most people use one of these accounts.

However, NPC believes the move is premature, given that the contract for the POCA lasts until 2021 and can be extended

further to 2024 if the government wishes.

The NPC also points to a House of Commons Library Briefing Paper dated 27 October 2017 which states: "People have the option of payment into a POCA until at least 2021."

Ron Douglas, NPC president said: "This is a really deceitful tactic by the DWP, that looks like it's trying to bully and mislead pensioners into closing down their Post Office Card accounts, long before they need to."

"It does not say that the POCA is still operating until 2021, and neither does it give the individual the choice of retaining their POCA if they so wish."

"The DWP are causing distress and confusion among large numbers of older people and the letter therefore needs to be withdrawn as a matter of urgency to avoid any further problems."