



Social Science

Inspecting a Nursing Home

V/o:

Inspecting a nursing home. We invited three retired London residents to form an informal inspection party and visit a purpose-built nursing home for older people in North London. The home was run by a non-profit-making voluntary organisation and had been opened for about a year.

Stella:

My name is Stella Best. Originally I was from Guyana and I came here to join my husband in 1955, and I'm 68, and I'm very active in the pensioners' movement. I've got a sight problem but by now I've accepted that so I get around sometimes with the help of my friends, or sometimes I'm quite able to get around on my own.

V/o:

We also invited Elizabeth Russell to join Stella in inspecting the home.

Elizabeth:

I am basically Scottish, I got conscripted during the war and came down to work in London, and never went back, and I moved to Islington, I think it was 1957.

V/o:

The third member of our inspection party was Teresa LeFort. Like Stella and Elizabeth, Teresa is now retired. She worked for thirty years in a canteen at Brunel University and has brought up her four children in North London.

Teresa:

What I first noticed when I came in was it's very clinical looking, there's no flowers, I'd like to see a bit more friendly atmosphere, it's like, I mean the receptionist here, there's nobody else about and I feel it's, you know, not welcoming enough.

V/o:

We also invited Hannah Hanley, an experienced health authority inspector to visit the home to give her impressions and to talk us through what she looks for.

Hannah:

When we do inspections we rely an awful lot on records so that we can't, there's nothing would replace checking of records, go round, you see the residents are all happy, well kept, clean, cleanliness, everything that one would expect to see, but is that just for the day?

V/o:

In this programme you will hear Hannah telling us something about what's involved in an announced inspection visit and you'll hear comments from Stella, Elizabeth and Teresa on what they thought and observed as each toured around the home. So what were Stella and Elizabeth's initial impressions when they came through the front door?

Stella:

As I came through there was a very friendly receptionist and that started to relax me right away from the officialdom of the place, but from the time that you get in you, a sort of hospital atmosphere, not by smell of course, just the layout, it gives you sort of official kind of place, you know.

Elizabeth:

When I got in, when somebody rescued me and opened the door, I thought it was lovely. It reminded me a bit of the home my mother ended her days in, and of course you see I went to the window immediately and there I saw my daughter's school, it made me feel oh, you know. I know this place, it feels sort of vaguely homey.

V/o:

As an inspector Hannah is aware of other issues too.

Hannah:

One check when coming into a home is the security, what is the security like, well can people get in at all, there could be too much security, but no, we would expect homes to be secure and so therefore we would check and see how we would gain entry, who was there, who was at reception.

V/o:

The nursing home has three floors with a dining room, communal lounge and bedrooms on each.

Stella:

Well I am not too keen on lifts, it always worries me it's going to be stuck between floors and as it says, you know, one of the problems sometimes you get in the lift and you can't see what button you want to press, but nowadays they always seem to have this speaking voice telling you which floor you're on which I find very good.

Elizabeth:

You sometimes feel like you're shut in and you're always wondering if there's any way the lift's going to get stuck, and it's usually sensible to have somebody else in the lift with you.

Stella:

It's very important that the lifts work because people, you know if they're on the second and third floor, you can't bring people using wheelchairs down, so it's very important that the lifts are not just working but there is a maintenance contract in place for the regular checking of these.

Teresa:

Hello, my name's Teresa, I've come to have a look round. And you like it here, do you?

Resident:

Well I've only been here a couple of weeks, two or three weeks, and I've just had a stroke and I have sort of not been well, you know.

Resident:

I think it's a bit small and a bit bare, I'd like to see, you know, a bit of decoration.

Resident:

This is a Paris to me, yes it's a Paris to me.

V/o:

For Hannah, too, talking with residents is an important part of the inspection process.

Hannah:

I do speak wherever possible to people who are wanting to speak to us during our inspections, and it's always important to speak to relatives although sometimes during the time of our inspection they're not available.

Hannah:

So what are you expecting for lunch today?

Resident:

Well I don't worry about lunch, it's always nice.

Hannah:

So you don't know what you're having yet?

Resident:

I don't know what I'm having yet.

Hannah:

Do you get a chance to order your lunch, did you choose your?

Resident: Yeah, I got an order yesterday, I'm diabetic and they're very kind to me, they've given me everything I need.

Hannah:

It's very difficult but you have to ask, and are they just saying that because we're here or not, and you get a feel for what they're saying. We would have checked out the care plan and that would be something we would have provided advice on about blood sugar levels and she's the only one who's controlled by insulin so hers needs to be kept an eye on. On doing our inspection we usually ask for a copy of the food menus to see what is actually, see whether is actually, to see whether it's nutritionally, we often ask for dieticians to have input to make sure that there is nutrition, that there's choice as well. You look at the type of resident accommodation in the home, what sort of ethnicities are in the home, are their needs being met, that sort of thing. You'd end up at the hygiene, we would, I would with Dr. Natheraja go and check the kitchen areas and look at how food is stored, you know, we're not obviously the Environment Health Officer but we do the checks and where there is, where we feel there may be a problem I would ask the local Environmental Health Officer of the local authority to do an inspection.

V/o:

Hannah also takes note of the way staff interact with the residents and of the recreational facilities and activities.

Stella:

Hi Celestina, she's the only one here and she's watching the telly.

Staff:

Oh she speak to you in Polish, which I find it very difficult to do. I know you speak very little English, so if you want to communicate with her you have to try some Polish, so she understand.

We would look and see what was going on generally, people might say oh god, the television was blaring, there's nobody watching it, but very often like we would look, last week I was in here, we had the activities organiser for the home

Staff:

And sometimes she brings a whole lot of hats and we model the hats for the residents.

V/o:

When Stella inspected the dining room she also observed the way staff behaved and commented on the atmosphere.

Stella:

Well it is a nursing home of course and you've got a healthy atmosphere, it's still a home, not a hospital dining room, sort of thing. The nurses still think the officials are wrong, give you the atmosphere of home, of hospital to the room. Yes, it's the sort of place you wouldn't want to really feel free to say what you want really to say. You would end up this kind of thing like it's not always wise to say what you really think.

V/o:

Stella, Elizabeth and Teresa raised several questions with staff when they were shown around the en suite bedrooms.

Do residents have television in their rooms?

Staff:

Yes they do if they want. You can bring in a television.

Elizabeth:

You can bring in a television, and can you bring a radio?

Staff:

Basically whatever you want as long as it can fit into the room.

Elizabeth:

But can you bring bookshelves if you want to?

Staff:

I don't see why not.

V/o:

Elizabeth was not keen on the large mirror in the en suite bathroom but she liked the idea of having a full length mirror in the bedroom.

Elizabeth:

I have a small mirror, you know just about face size above the basin, none of this practically full frontal stuff. Well I suppose one has to have one but they become less pleasing with age, you don't always want to see a frank picture of yourself but I suppose we have to know.

Staff:

On the subject of mirrors we do have mirrors in the wardrobes as well, full length mirrors.

Elizabeth:

Yes certainly I would want a full length mirror like that just to see what I've put on, you know whether I'd made some terrible mistake about the colouring or something, at least have some idea what I was looking like. It's a bit of keeping your self respect, isn't it?

V/o:

Teresa noticed something else missing from the bedrooms that concerned her.

Teresa:

There's no tea-making facilities in the bedroom, they shouldn't assume that people can't do things for themselves, and they shouldn't assume that they may still have a problem with hot water or whatever, that occasionally you want to do things, you like to be independent.

Elizabeth:

Making cups of tea and being able to, you know if you make a friend here, as you would hope that you might do, that you could sort of get yourself away, you know, make a little private life somewhere in a corner, and make yourself little cups of tea, the kind of biscuits you like, and food may be more important to me than it is to some people, but I think it does matter.

Teresa:

We're in the bathroom on this floor, which is the third floor, and it looks like a hospital bathroom to tell you the truth, but I suppose that's what it's for.

Stella:

Like some of the residents might like to get proper baths, soak in the bath, that's what I like, proper baths.

V/o:

Hannah works through a mental checklist that she's built up from her inspection experience.

Hannah:

I mean with regard to the actual facilities, that was all checked prior to registration, but you want to see how it's been kept maintained – is the light bulb falling down or, you know, are there any risks or any wet floors that people might slip on, the toilet area's been cleaned. I would probably turn the taps on, yeah, and turn the hot water tap on and they should be not too hot.

V/o:

One thing that interested Stella, Elizabeth and Teresa was the hairdressing room with its weekly service.

Stella:

I go to the hairdresser's like every other week or something, but it can be pricey although they're not doing much to it, you know, to wash and set it, just to wash and plait it is about £15-16 and that is pensioner's rate so I don't go often, so getting it done every week would be a plus.

There isn't much you can do with my hair because of course I'm West Indian so it would be different. I like my hair plaited, but I mean from the hairdressing point of view that would be good because at least you can get it washed and set even if you can't plait it.

Elizabeth:

I don't have a hairdresser every week as things stand at the moment, you know, I don't do that but it would be very nice to think that I could, and I would have thought it was sort of important for my self respect. I don't know how publicly people live but I mean I can slop round in my own house looking like nothing on earth, but in a more public place it would be more important.

Teresa:

I need to get my hair done every so often, I mean all I have is a cut, shampoo and set.

I'd like perhaps to see something else here, other beauty aids where you don't have to go the whole hog but, you know, you'd like something like aromatherapy or something like, you know, relaxation.

V/o:

So at the end of their tours what did Stella, Elizabeth and Teresa conclude?

Stella:

I found the general layout of the place was OK. The thing was I didn't like that struck me was the staffing arrangement. The staff were all black to say the thing, and they were all very young, and if I was living here I couldn't relate to those young people. I am black, of course, but if I wasn't black that's another thing, I couldn't relate to them. I would have preferred to see a few middle-aged people who can bring the gossips over the road and so on, and just stimulate you in some argument or a nice conversation.

Elizabeth:

I do agree with Stella. If they're very young obviously I'd find that really very difficult, but I don't mind having younger people, I wouldn't want to be totally surrounded by the old.

Stella:

I did want to know if this place is too expensive because I mean Islington got no ends of black people, and why this new nursing home only has one, strike me right away that it is a very expensive place where they wouldn't send blacks, you know that's why I was worried about the staffing because the staffing seem quite young and they're all black, and what once in my mind and that is because the analogy with peanuts and monkeys; they put a lot of blacks there because they want to pay them little or nothing, you know.

Teresa:

Yeah I agree with Stella, there is a problem with getting staff and if they don't pay them decent wages then they will go for people that are not likely to perhaps make a fuss or whatever.

Elizabeth:

It wouldn't worry me to come here and see black nursing staff, except I might think they were being exploited but it wouldn't worry me for myself.

Teresa:

I was worried because of the lack of visual and homely things, and things to do, because if you look around the rooms there's no magazines on the table, there's television somewhere, and there was a little radio in the dining room, but even in the activities room there's nothing on display, is there, and it's a fallacy to think that because you're getting older and you've got a disease like Alzheimer's that you don't need any stimulation, because you do, because that's part of the way of getting better.

Elizabeth:

Well I asked about radio and television in your room, and taking in books, that would do some of it. I also asked about making cups of coffee, you know, in your own room and having a chat with somebody, that would do some of it. Apart from that I do wonder because you come in and there's a, it's very quiet when you come in, it's a bit like a nunnery, at least what I think a nunnery is like, never actually lived in one, and that worried me.

Stella:

It strike me as soon as we come in here this is one of those places that's kept very clean and very looked after but it's a place where you come in to do as you're told.