

Care home study maps lockdown impact on families, says George Palattiyil

A new study is to gauge how lockdown restrictions have affected the families of care home residents.

Edinburgh researchers and their collaborators will assess the psychological impact – and the wider social repercussions – of distancing and other COVID-19 related constraints. The team, led by the University of Edinburgh's School of Social and Political Science, will also evaluate how physical-distancing restrictions on families have influenced the quality of care. The study will explore the creative methods used to encourage positive interaction between care home residents and their loved ones. Its findings will inform future policy and practice.

Significant effect

Restrictions such as social distancing and reduced personal contact have had a significant effect on people living in care homes. Since lockdown, residents' family members and non-essential visitors have been unable to enter care home premises. Lead researcher Dr George Palattiyil, Senior Lecturer of Social Work, said ongoing involvement is a key concern for families once a relative has been admitted to a care home. Lockdown, he added, has the potential to compound any fears and anxieties, and possibly amplify the psychological impact of having a family member in care. "An understanding of how to support the health and wellbeing of family caregivers and loved ones supporting older people is significant given the impact the pandemic is having," says Dr Palattiyil.

Working together

Researchers will work with care homes across Scotland to recruit around 50 family carers whose relatives are residents. They will be interviewed and asked to fill out an online survey. Staff in care homes will also be invited to share innovative ways they have managed to communicate with relatives. The project involves the University's Usher Institute, the University of the West of Scotland, the University of Strathclyde and the Institute for Research & Innovation in Social Services. It has been awarded £150,000 by the Chief Scientist Office. Researchers will engage with Scottish Government policy teams throughout the project. "What we learn about the creative methods used to encourage positive interaction between residents and their loved ones can make a vital contribution to care in the long term," says Dr Dina Sidhva, Co-Investigator, University of the West of Scotland.

Dr George Palattiyil is a senior lecturer in the School of Social and Political Science at the University of Edinburgh.