

choice of home carer

I will always remember a conversation with a colleague in a disability agency over three decades ago. If we needed support to shower or put food in our mouths, which of the 35 staff would we choose?

We both concluded that only two would suit us, people with initiative, a quiet manner and sense of humour.

Home care is a wonderful service, enabling many of us to remain in our own homes as we age. For this we must thank our district health board and fellow taxpayers.

During my decades of work in the disability sector I saw mutual, respectful and friendly relationships develop between kaitiaki or carer and those receiving support. Yet the provision of home care is limited and fraught with differing expectations.

In July 2017, a pay equity claim resulted in home care and rest home workers receiving a well overdue pay rise. Their work is difficult.

On low pay, still less than the living wage, they must maintain a car to move between homes, an hour here and then half an hour with someone else, then maybe a two-hour break, with no pay but not enough time, or petrol, to go home.

Carers perform a variety of tasks from personal care (showers, toileting) to household management (cooking, washing, cleaning). They also provide emotional support to often isolated people who range from friendly and grateful to depressed and angry at the hand life has played them.



As well as the expectations of their employing agency, carers juggle the needs and expectations of those they support. We all have different standards of cleanliness. For some daily vacuuming is essential, for others once or twice a week suffices.

Agency co-ordinators must have nightmares organising rosters for 100 or more staff with the needs of the people they support. They also have health and safety inspectors breathing down their necks.

Most agencies now forbid carers from standing on chairs for small but essential tasks such as changing a light bulb or cleaning the tops of windows.

There are guidelines too around handling money. When my uncle's hip gave him pain he would give a care worker his eftpos card and pin number to go shopping for him. She went against her agency policy to do this essential task and was always scrupulously honest.



grey matters by Ruth Gerzon



A fortnightly series for seniors by Ruth Gerzon from Eastern Bay Villages.

Two years ago the DHB introduced a Responsive Model of care for Older People. Support is no longer allocated in terms of half hour or hours but in terms of tasks to support people to be as independent as possible.

Once a task is completed the support worker moves on to another client. Most recipients of care are unaware of this and may feel short changed if their carer leaves before the hour or half hour is up.

A lack of accessible transport causes isolation and exacerbates ill health and home care services are not able to help commensurate with this need. Last week a man had to postpone a cataract operation in Tauranga because he had no way of getting there. Others find it painful to go shopping or miss doctors' appointments.

One thing people need is flexibility. We are all different and each week our support needs may change. When on a parliamentary select committee, deputy mayor Judy Turner heard from disabled people. She never forgot one young man saying, "I am sick of being done and dusted. I just want to go to the pub with my friends".

How would you cope with the inevitable intrusion that results from personal care? Who would you want to do this? Would you want to choose your carer? Imagine how much better your quality of life would be if you chose both your carers, and how these carers spent their time? Sound too good to be true? Well it's not.

The Ministry of Health supports disabled people under 65 and gives them that choice, through individualised funding. I have seen what a huge difference this makes. Why should this not be available to us all? Surely older people, whose support is funded by the district health board, are just as deserving of such flexible support.

Interested in finding out more, or making any concerns known? Eastern Bay Villages has organised two public meetings to discuss issues of district health board funded support for older people at home. Both will be at Knox Presbyterian Church in Domain Road, Whakatane at 10am.

The provision of home care services meeting, with presentations from the three home care providers: Disabilities Resource Centre Trust, Te Puna Ora o Mataatua and Healthcare NZ, is on Tuesday, April 2.

The allocation of support for older people living at home with Support Net and the District Health Board's planning and funding portfolio holder for older people will be on May 14.

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