

SOCIAL CARE

The Clinically Abandoned

The Inquiry completes five weeks of hearings about the impact of covid on social care homes and their residents. It is not a happy story, and few will escape the criticism that will inevitably follow.

Counsel for patients and relatives pull no punches in relating the personal stories now firmly entered in the evidence.

From March 2020 care home residents had their contact with their relatives and partners abruptly curtailed. They could no longer access the communal areas in their homes, eat with friends or mix with fellow residents.

They were, one Counsel explained, placed in solitary confinement. Many had been transferred from hospital without a covid test in order to clear hospital beds.

Care homes were a dangerous place to be in a pandemic.

Remote visiting at a distance via windows added to the trauma. In the early months staff working in care home had very limited access to PPE.

As Counsel for Scottish Bereaved put it *“It felt like going to a zoo, watching animals on display, surrounded by notices saying, do not disturb, don’t go near”* and these were often parents or loved ones.

The isolation created a wedge between members of some families. Relatives lost their role as partners in care.

The bar on relatives visiting in order to reduce infection transmission did not stop care homes employing agency staff who moved between multiple homes. GPs rarely visited.

Clinical care in this sector was according to one Counsel, abandoned as were the independent inspections (in case they spread the infection). Many witnesses reported a sharp



decline in the health and wellbeing of residents in social care.

As restrictions eased the care home sector remained closed. There were no tiers for the care home sector.

Protecting the hospital sector from being overwhelmed was achieved at the expense of social care some witnesses argued.

There is much criticism of the evidence given by some of those in the national decision-making process. Some, it was argued, were trying to avoid their accountability.

There was limited experience of social care at the centre of the NHS.

The statistical evidence they presented was according to Mark Twain (yes we go back that far) and a famous Scot Andrew Lang, a case of using statistics *“as a drunk uses a lamppost, more for support than illumination”*.

As one expert witness put it
*“the challenge for
tomorrow is not whether we
can build a better system
but whether we will choose
to do so? History will judge
this moment not by what
went wrong but what we
chose to do next”.*

One hopes the government
is not waiting for the
Inquiry final report before
taking action...

**... but I fear I may be
disappointed.**