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Cameos of Care Homes

Revealing the resilience and expertise of care homes



Six 'Vanguard' areas across England have been developing approaches to enable care homes to better support the increasingly complex health needs of their residents, as part of the NHS New Care Models Programme. The participating care homes can offer inspiration to others, and their staff have stories to tell about the support they received and the expertise they have developed. 'Cameos of Care Homes' has captured these stories within one Vanguard area - East and North Hertfordshire - where staff in two care homes reflected on their experiences. Between them, these 12 staff have over 210 years of experience of working in social care. This booklet outlines the messages in the 'Cameos of Care Homes' film. The project took place 2017–2018, and it was funded by NHS England.

Key messages

When care home staff and managers talked about taking part in the Vanguard they described the impact on individual staff, on their care for their residents and on the wider care home:

- Empowering care home staff by improving individuals' knowledge, confidence and morale, and by building the communication skills and learning culture of the collective staff team.
- Supporting staff in improving the quality of care to residents by being better at preventative care, therefore reducing call outs to GPs, district nurses, ambulances, and ultimately reducing hospital admissions, whilst also improving relationships with local health service partners.
- Participating was resource intensive for individual staff, in the training they took on, and managers to release staff for 'Champions' training and to oversee changes in practice.
- But elements of the Vanguard saved resources: *Impartial Assessors* saved senior staff time travelling to hospitals; *Medicine Optimisation* reduced administering unnecessary medication; and *Red Bags* reduced the need to repeatedly give information to hospital staff and to chase residents' lost possessions.
- Strong commitment was needed from care home staff, managers and owners, as was ongoing support from Vanguard training bodies to embed new knowledge and skills and to refresh and update learning.

Why care homes got involved in the Vanguard

Staff in the two care homes talked about getting involved at different waves of the Vanguard, and were in contrasting positions regarding their CQC rating, but both homes welcomed the investment in staff training that it offered, and the resultant boost to their care for residents:

“We got involved ... as a result of acknowledging the complexity of residents that we were receiving ... The Vanguard gave us an opportunity due to the level of investment that we could give to our staffing team ... with the aim of raising the overall standard of care offered by everyone in the home to all our residents, and in particular to those suffering from complex needs.”

“When I came on board in 2016, the home was on embargo ... the training that was involved with the Vanguard - we felt it would be a good idea, and Hertfordshire County Council also recommended that it would ... empower our staff and give them a lot of knowledge ... We wanted to reduce the amount of admissions of residents we send into hospital.”

Different elements of the Vanguard

Care home staff talked of different elements of the Vanguard that they had experienced: training to become **Complex Care Champions**, the introduction of ‘Impartial Assessors’ for hospital discharge, the **Medicine Optimisation** programme, the ‘Red Bags’ scheme, the ‘Home First’ rapid response service and the ‘Early Intervention Vehicle’.

Complex Care Champions

It was this element of the Vanguard that care home staff and managers reported as having the greatest impact on their care homes. The Vanguard offered six specialist training pathways, in the areas of: dementia, nutrition, engagement, falls, wound care and health (including end of life, continence, neurological and respiratory conditions). The initial wave of ‘complex care premium champion’ training was described as ‘intense’ and staff were not always confident undertaking it, although *“at the end of it, it was worth it”*:

“Pretty intense ... It was great to meet other people from other homes, several different carers at different levels and we were all able to exchange opinions and find out how different homes worked ... there was an awful lot of homework involved.”

“We did homework every night, every night. I came home with a big folder and had to go home and sit maybe a couple of hours ... I have got more confidence now, you know, the rest of the carers will listen to me.”

Champions and their care homes had fed back to the Vanguard that the initial wave of training was very intensive in the demands it made on staff time, study skills and confidence. They described positive changes to the Champions training programme, which was now broken down into incremental modules:

“It was full on when you go into the training, you don't know what to expect and it was quite challenging ... We gave feedback ... I think they took it on board and they split it up. So for this one ... you were introduced to it gradually where you build your confidence to get to the level where you need to deliver training, so that was brilliant.”

“When the Vanguard was initially introduced they came with the ‘Complex Care Premium’ and that was quite heavy ... but the way it was introduced this time around, starting from having ‘Complex Care Access’, you do a few more modules and then you go on to do ‘Complex Care Foundation’ ... It has actually been great because it builds the staff confidence slowly.”

They had also fed back that Champions and their care homes needed more support during and after training to ensure that Champions' new knowledge and skills were implemented, and supplemented where needed:

“The first time there was no support ... but now they do home visits and they call and we are able to also call them and say, you know there is somebody there for support.”

“The Hertfordshire Care Providers Association has been great in a way that they have come to visit to see how we are doing and how we are managing? Are we doing our cascading of the training?”

“Refreshers have been offered and they came from Hertfordshire Care Providers Association, they have come out and visited us regularly. We have meetings together here as staff with management and all the Champions we get together and have a chat about if there is anything else we need ... It's been really well run, really good.”

Some Champions who participated in the first wave of training said they would be reluctant to take on a similar study load again, however both homes reported that whilst initially many staff were reluctant to train as Champions, they now have a waiting list:

“It was hard work. Once I got that all done, then I was happy enough, I don't know about that now [laughs] ... would have to think about that. It's the homework that put me off.”

“The reason why I became the health champion was because the staff were not forthcoming ... now people are queuing to take the position so I'm ready to relinquish the position for them.”

The hardest resource implication for homes was the amount of time Champions needed to spend away from their frontline care roles, and colleagues often needed to take on additional shifts:

“The main area of concern was the amount of training that the staff had to do ... A lot of time is spent on the training and that meant having to fill shifts in here when the staff went out.”

“What has been difficult ... is having to send staff on training, although we have been very lucky with our home owner, they are very open to actually putting in the resources, because they can see the effects ... We were 'inadequate', I think within eight months, we got to 'good' ... the benefits outweigh the cost.”

Whilst the Vanguard was working to improve multi-disciplinary support for care home residents, ensuring other professions in the locality understood the developments was an occasional challenge:

“District nurses were automatically assuming that it meant that we took their role ... We fed that back ... it would probably be good if they let all the district nurses know, and so we were all on board. That

was the only difficulty - just knowing to tread a fine line and not try and take over, or tell district nurses their job. It all worked out really well.”

Champions described the positive impact of their training on their confidence, skills and knowledge, and on the quality of care that they, and colleagues that they had cascaded training to, could now provide. Criticisms were a level of repetition in the material covered, and that that the 'engagement' training did not recognize the degree of dementia that residents are living with:

<p>Improvements to wound care</p> <p>“Definitely loads more confidence - just knowing that you know what you are talking about, as before totally relied on district nurses. To have this knowledge and to have passed that on ... and to see the staff have so much confidence ... it has benefited all of our residents. We are on top of wound care - very rarely see a pressure ulcer ... residents that have arrived with grade 3 [ulcers], come in as emergency ... with all our knowledge and care and the staff, working obviously with the district nurses as well, we have been able to see these grade 3s heal up - fantastic work.”</p>	<p>Improvements to engaging residents</p> <p>“I am the engagement champion within the nursing home here - it followed on really from me being the activities lead here. I welcomed the opportunity to do extra training ... some of the training was indeed very good... What I was hoping to be able to get was a better knowledge for myself personally, that I could pass onto the other activity members on how we can stimulate and support the residents that are more mid to late dementia ... our residents’ needs here are very, very strong and that is where I just feel that this training let me down a little bit.”</p>
<p>Improvements to nutrition</p> <p>“I can see the impact ... with the knowledge I have now I know how to support the residents more in order to meet their person-centred needs ... it can be quite challenging when you know your resident needs nutrients, but they’re not having it, based on their confusion, on dementia and they don't understand.”</p>	<p>Reduction in falls</p> <p>“The successes - I think there has been a reduction in falls, because all the staff now that they have had the training from the Champions to try and prevent falls. So, there has been fewer falls and admissions to hospital because of it, and generally for the whole thing there has been, we are not admitting people to hospital as we used to.”</p>
<p>Improvements to health care</p> <p>“In one of the trainings ... it was recommended to have fresh lemon juice ... we prepare it ourselves for our residents who have recurrent UTIs ... to prevent us calling the GP for antibiotics.”</p> <p>“Because I deliver the training, I incorporate the knowledge as I go along. I might be doing manual handling and infection control and I will chip in some of the information.”</p>	<p>Improvements to dementia care</p> <p>“Prior to becoming a dementia Champion I don't feel there was a lot of dementia training around, so I was really looking forward to doing it ... to get that knowledge and then pass it back to the staff, for them to have that experience in how to support people with dementia ... I am now the qualified dementia trainer, so I come in and I train the staff at least once a month ... it's something really worth doing.”</p>

‘Impartial Assessor’ for hospital discharge

This element of the Vanguard was described by care homes as a great success – saving staff time travelling back and forth to hospital to carry out assessments in person. The Impartial Assessors are independent nurses, based in the local hospital to assess patients prior to discharge to a care home, but employed independently by the Hertfordshire Care Providers Association to ensure that they retain their neutral status:

“We did have a problem when one of the assessors left and of course that meant myself or one of the staff going up to the hospital and spending a lot of time doing the assessments. But now they have recruited and it's great. We can just make one phone call and I have an assessment on my desk and out in about hour.”

“It has helped in the form of resources and it has helped in the form of developing relationships with the hospital ... now we have somebody who is like an in-between ... it's not the hospital just trying to get the residents, the patients, out of the hospital ... it has been very productive”

Medicine Optimisation

As part of the Vanguard, care home staff described pharmacists visiting care homes alongside GPs to review residents' medication, whilst talking to the staff and reviewing a resident's records. The nutrition Champions have also, in consultation with the pharmacists and GPs, taken the lead in making homemade smoothies and fruit juices to replace nutritional supplements and laxatives:

“Medicine optimisation has helped a lot ... pharmacist came over and they spoke to the staff at the same time with the GP and we went through the Medication Administration Records (MAR) chart ... [and] care plan as well to see whether the person actually needs the medication ... That has helped in a lot of ways ... with my experience as a nutritional Champion they advise ... [we] give the support to the resident from food [first].”

“Previously if a resident wasn't eating we would ask the GP for nutritional supplements - now we make our own shakes.”

“With medication it's gone down ... do they really need these tablets? ... we have cut lots of the cost in this programme.”

“The reduction of medication as well which was causing people to fall, it has been really beneficial to our residents.”

'Red Bag' scheme

The introduction of the 'Red Bag' scheme in partnership with one local hospital was heralded as an excellent idea by care home staff, albeit one that had teething problems. A bag packed by care home staff travels in the ambulance with a resident to hospital, to ensure their information and belongings go with them. The ambulance staff pass it to hospital staff on arrival, providing information about the patient and so reducing phone calls to the care home, and improving support for the patient. The bag is re-packed with up-to-date documentation when the resident returns to the home, and, as each care home has a unique number, any lost or un-used bags can be returned to be cleaned and re-used:

“It was a sigh of relief, because most of our residents, when they go into hospital you have nothing to pack their stuff in. Sometimes you need to be looking for bin bags, which is not dignified, so when we saw the red bag all the staff were jumping and saying, 'yes!' ... it's between the NHS and the care homes, there is an understanding to say, when anything we put in the bag ... there is accountability and so it goes and it comes back. Also, the brilliant aspect of the red bag is the introduction of having a spare home dress in it. Most of our residents when they were coming back from hospital, they come back with a hospital gown ... everything is showing.”

“The beauty of it is, every home is allocated ... a number, so even when it gets misplaced anywhere in the hospital, it's traced and it's brought back ... We know exactly what goes in the bag ... all staff have been trained, irrespective of who is on duty they know exactly what to pack.”

“We send the residents to a hospital and put everything in the red bags and getting there, you get a phone call ... asking you the things that you have already sent. You are saying to them, 'But I have already sent all those ... why are you asking me again?' It hasn't worked so well with us, at the moment.”

‘Home First’ rapid response service and the ‘Early Intervention Vehicle’

Care staff described two complementary services introduced to provide rapid health support to enable residents to remain within the care home, rather than be unnecessarily admitted to hospital: ‘Home First’ and the ‘Early Intervention Vehicle.’ Staff described examples of both successfully supporting their residents as part of the Vanguard:

“We have got people here with COPD and at the moment we have got one lady so the ‘Home First’ are involved, they come and see her and we’ve got ‘just in case’ medication the GP will give us ... if she gets worse, just ring the ‘Home First’ because she is known to ‘Home First’, they will come and check her ... has been working good.”

“It’s been really good because I witnessed one that was an issue, one of our residents had a ‘hypo’, he was on insulin. We rang the ambulance ... they sent the [Early Intervention Vehicle] ... the gentleman came here and then he dealt with the situation before the ambulance people came ... it was very effective.”

Successes from taking part in the Vanguard

We asked care staff and managers if they thought there had been successes from taking part in the Vanguard and the reoccurring stories they told us were of it empowering staff by improving staff knowledge, confidence and morale, and building the communication skills and learning culture of the staff team. This had led to them improving the quality of care to their residents, and being better at preventative care was reducing call outs to GPs, district nurses, ambulances, and ultimately reducing hospital admissions. The greater skills and confidence of staff in managing the complex health needs of their residents were also improving relationships with health partners.

Empowering staff, improving knowledge, confidence and morale to better meet residents’ needs

Emphatically care home staff and managers told us that the Vanguard training had empowered all staff, by boosting the knowledge, skills and confidence not only of the individual Champions, but by the cascading of the Champions’ training to all care home colleagues. The direct impact of this was that they were now meeting resident’s needs better and faster:

“Not only did we upskill the levels of knowledge and confidence that resulted for our Champions, but we could also cascade that information and knowledge down to all of our staffing team ... raising the overall standard of care offered by everyone in the home to all of our residents.”

“The biggest success is the staff empowerment - if you empower staff, you build their morale and that has been the best thing that has come out of it. And also, for the residents ... their needs have been met quicker, because carers are the front line and they are the ones that have the ‘one to one’ with the residents before they can even get to call the nurse, myself or call the GP.”

“One of the staff that has worked here for thirteen, fourteen years and when we started had never delivered training ... now she delivers the dementia training, and seeing her gain the confidence and build knowledge ... it just builds the staff morale. It’s really contributed to the environment in general in the home.”

“People were not confident to talk on the phone or when they were asked questions - paramedics come and they think, ‘Oh, I am a carer and I can’t talk to them, I need to go and look for a nurse’. But now everybody is empowered, and they are confident.”

Building a learning culture and team communication by sharing knowledge

Greatly valued, but less expected, were the broader shifts that care homes described in their teams' culture of learning and communication, that had stemmed from the practical need to cascade the training that Champions had brought back to their care homes:

“Another thing that has come out of this for us, as a home, is ... how to build communication within the team ... to pass on our knowledge on to staff ... It might just be we want to talk about our foot care, we would do that in fifteen minutes. If we hadn't done the Vanguard we wouldn't have that ... this Vanguard ... has given us the opportunity to say, you know what - training is ongoing. It can be a 'one to one' five minutes with someone.”

“Staff are challenging me, and as the trainer I am going: 'Yes, this is what we want!' ... If in the team we can't challenge each other, then the team is a failing team.”

“I would say the Vanguard programme has been quite positive, because in-house we do what we call the 'Champions' meeting' where we sit down and everybody contributes from their various departments. Each time we sit down, we pick one resident each to talk ... How can we support the residents? How can we increase nutrition and how can we support their engagement? If they have a pressure sore, we have the one champion to support as well. So, it's been a positive thing working as a team and everybody contributing their quota to make sure that the resident has been well assisted with their quality of life.”

Greater preventative care leading to reduced reliance on health services

Care home staff described a stronger preventative approach to addressing the complex health needs of their residents, thanks to the expertise of the Champions and the cascading of that knowledge and confidence to all staff:

“One of the main problems I think was the fact that the staff weren't trained enough to deal with emergencies ... staff have now become more confident in dealing with any issues that arise in the home, so if somebody is taken ill, they do as good a job as say, a district nurse would do or even some of the ambulance crew ... they can recognise what needs to be done and take the appropriate action.”

“Fantastic results ... less GP call outs, less district nurse call outs and then, crucially, less A&E attendances.”

“The Vanguard ... has built the staff knowledge and their understanding of what to look for if a patient is going into a critical condition or their condition is deteriorating, and that has helped a lot.”

“I would say the success is the lower hospital admissions, which is as a result of confidence of staff, because of the knowledge staff pick up the signs quicker, so that we take action before it escalates.”

Improved relationships with health partners

Alongside reduced reliance on health partners, care home staff felt that those partners had greater confidence in the care they were providing their residents, and this had improved communication and relationships:

“We have always had good relationships with GPs, with the hospitals, the psychogeriatrician. I think it's all been enhanced by the whole programme - the different areas like the Clinical Commissioning Group and social services have more confidence in what we are actually doing.”

“Our relationships ... [with] our GP practice and particularly our district nursing team has improved ... They know that we are able to cater for ... our residents in the first instance in a better way.”

Concluding comments from 'Comeos of Care Homes'

Care home staff and managers were keen to celebrate the successes of their participation in the Vanguard, whilst emphasizing that it was resource intensive for individual staff and for homes releasing their staff for training and overseeing changes in culture and practice. Needed for success were strong commitment and leadership from care home managers and owners:

"Being part of the Vanguard hasn't always been easy. There is a large level of commitment that needs to come from senior management, to commit to releasing staff to training and to then implement the staff learning within the home. So there needs to be a strong ethos within the organisation and clear leadership."

"When something new is being introduced, to get used to it is a challenge. However, the managers they have been very supportive. It's actually reduced stress and everybody worked on it and we saw the benefits very quickly."

Whilst the Vanguards formally ended in April 2018, the care homes were looking forward to successful elements of the Vanguard continuing:

"I know of the plan for further Champion courses to be continued. We are very pleased ... We are determined to continue upskilling our staff to really empower them to give the highest level of care, which, at the end of the day is what they want and what we all want."

"It's progressing all the time, because we are now looking at having the access to health records online and being able to communicate with the hospital and the GP much more effectively."



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For info on the East and North Hertfordshire Vanguard

www.enhertsvanguard.uk

For info on all the 'Enhanced Health in Care Homes' Vanguards

www.england.nhs.uk/new-care-models/vanguards/care-models/care-homes-sites

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