



Beloved...dad Charles

'Rules left mum and dad alone'

By Giles Sheldrick

KATE Meacock's father was languishing in hospital during the pandemic, her mother stuck in a care home.

Her dad Charles had Parkinson's, and in November 2021 went into hospital for three weeks. Kate was able to see him just twice.

Once discharged, he went into respite care and was later admitted to Surrey's Frimley Park Hospital, which had a closed-door policy, banning visits.

When they wanted to discharge him, Kate got a brief chance to see Charles, who died aged 85 last month. She said: "This dreadful experience had a severe effect on him mentally and physically."

Meanwhile, Caroline, her 76-year-old mother, has Alzheimer's and was cut off from Kate in her care home for a year from March 2020.

Restrictions remain to this day, and Kate needs an appointment to see her and is escorted in via a fire escape. Kate added: "Only last week could grandchildren under 12 start visiting again."

Retirees shun care homes over high fees and isolation

THE number of people in care homes has plummeted since the start of the pandemic, with potential residents saying they're scared of being separated from their families and having to pay stratospheric costs.

It leaves more than a fifth of care home beds in England unfilled. And the percentage of residents paying for care is also down, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) found.

There were 360,792 residents occupying 77.8 per cent of care home beds between March 1, 2021, and February 28 of this year. Of those, 34.9 per cent (125,954 residents) were paying for some or all of their care, with the remainder funded by the state.

But between August 2019 and March 2020, when the pandemic started, the ONS estimated there were 391,927 residents occupying 84.7 per cent of beds. Of these, 36.7 per cent (143,774) were self-funded.

Unaffordable

Caroline Abrahams, charity director at Age UK, said: "It's no surprise that occupancy is down. If it's because older people and their families have decided staying at home with care coming in is the better option for them then it's probably no bad thing."

"However, the worry is that some older people are being put off by fear of isolation from family and friends, as witnessed during the pandemic, or by unaffordable fees."

She added: "Independently run care homes can't afford losses for any length of time. The big chains can ride out a bad patch, but ongoing vacancies will jeopardise the continuation of most smaller care home busi-

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nesses. We don't want to lose any more care homes just now, as it's hard enough for older people to find a good one nearby as it is."

The ONS analysed data from care homes for adults of all ages collected by the Care Quality Commission.

The Independent Care Group, which represents providers in York and North Yorkshire, said alarm bells should be ringing. Chairman Mike Padgham said: "Covid-19 devastated bed occupancy, and admission levels are struggling to recover because confidence has been affected."

"At the same time, the sector is going through a staffing crisis. And now rocketing bills are placing huge financial pressures on those homes. This is a terrible time for the social care sector – the worst I have known."



In need of a helping hand...a care home resident

FOR the third time, we have written to the Care Quality Commission about its role during the pandemic. Previous letters have focused on its inaction.

As older people in care were isolated from their families, the CQC's lack of action left them at continued risk.

The impact was devastating as people deteriorated from loneliness or felt abandoned in the fog of dementia.

The CQC's own guidance is making the situation worse. On managing infection, it

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encourages profoundly concerning practices such as isolating residents in their rooms after hospital visits, the use of visiting rooms, screens and booking systems.

Our helpline would hear how

unworkable visiting rooms are for people with dementia who would often just leave and become upset or even angry when their visitor didn't follow.

People have told us their homes have felt more like prison.

It is little wonder people face an uphill battle when the CQC's guidance is encouraging restrictions on fundamental rights. It is astonishing and completely unacceptable for the regulator, which exists to protect people from harm, to be promoting such poor care.

Toll of abuse suffered by locked-up residents

COMPLAINTS about the neglect, abuse and ill-treatment of locked-up care-home residents averaged 44 a day at the height of the pandemic.

There were 16,170 "contacts" between families and the Care Quality Commission watchdog in

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2021, up three per cent on the year before. This year the figure stands at 6,437 or 46 every day.

The crisis – exacerbated by families being banned from visiting

their sick and dying loved ones – prompted campaigners The Relatives & Residents Association to write to the regulator demanding action.

The CQC said it does not record contacts as "complaints". It said not all of them represent grievances but

it did probe concerns raised. Meanwhile, the continuing Covid care home visiting scandal has prompted 60 MPs to write to Health and Social Care Secretary Sajid Javid about the "severe impact isolation has caused".