



Dying
Matters

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Putting the care in care homes: how ellenor helps provide personalised experiences for local residents

The charity supports patients with life-limited illnesses and their families within the Kent and Bexley communities. While we provide care from both inpatient and outpatient units in Northfleet – in addition to a range of wellbeing services – the majority of our work takes place within the community. That's both from the homes of our patients, as well as a number of local care homes, too.

Our role at care homes is twofold. On the one hand, it involves providing backup to the staff, in both clinical and operational matters. On the other, it's supporting

the residents –chatting with them, comforting them, understanding their needs, and helping to facilitate conversations around their future treatment options and preferences.

One such individual is Alice, a 75-year-old resident of Northfleet-based Wombwell Hall Care Home. Alice receives regular visits from Natalie – a Staff Nurse with our Care Home Support Team – every six weeks. Natalie’s support helps ensure Alice, along with the 30 other residents in her unit, is able to make autonomous decisions about her future.

This includes preparations that are both financial – such as will writing and funeral planning –as well as clinical. Natalie works with Wombwell Hall’s residents, for instance, to understand where each individual wishes to be cared for –whether that’s a hospital, a hospice, or at home –should their condition deteriorate, and they become unable to specify this for themselves.

“I don’t think there’s anything I haven’t discussed with Natalie,” says Alice, in a recent interview with ellenor. Due to a hereditary condition, Alice is blind –yet, for all intents and purposes, she is very well.And, contrary to common misconceptions around care homes and hospices (that they’re places people just go ‘to die’), Alice is *living* –and has the banter, bounciness, and biting sense of humour to prove it.

The ticket stubs, too –with a little help from Wombwell Hall’s Wellbeing Coordinator John Kefford, Alice has rocked out to a live Elton John tribute act, seeing the (almost) Rocket Man himself take to the stage. Couple this with picnics, arts and crafts classes, and trips to take in the live music and food at local pub *The Six Bells*, and in many ways, Alice has the lifestyle and *joie de vivre* of a woman half her age.

Death isn’t in the picture – so should people like Alice be talking about it?

“I think they should,” Alice says. “Because people don’t want to talk about it, when the time *does* come, they’re going to be so upset that they probably won’t know what hit them when they become really ill.”

“You can become sick any time of your life, can’t you? I’m well, but I’ll probably get poorly at some stage –I’m not going to be well all my life!”.

Alice's point –which, true to form, is refreshingly down to earth and direct –highlights the importance at the centre of planning for the future. After all, death will happen to every one of us at some stage –why not be ready for it when it does?

“We've spoken about the ‘what ifs’,” Nurse Natalie says of her conversations with Alice. “I can make sure that the care home staff and a lot of people –such as her GP, and the ambulance service –actually know what she wants. Should Alice become unwell at any stage, everyone is aware of what her choices would be.”

Make no mistake, though –these conversations are rarely ‘strictly business’. With around 120 care home residents in total under her care, Natalie –who gets to know each and every one of them –embodies our commitment to individualised, highly personal care.

“You have a different relationship with every resident. I know about people's families, and their backgrounds...sometimes people tell me stories that they've never told a single soul, which is amazing.”

Against this backdrop, it's hard to reconcile these practical –yet inspiring –conversations with the ‘doom and gloom’ mentality that planning for the eventuality of one's death is so inevitably tarred with. Likewise, it's impossible to witness Alice's zest for life–and the uplifting relationship she has with our Natalie – and still believe in the stale, outdated stereotypes surrounding care homes and hospice care.

Whether it's from a financial, clinical, or purely philosophical sense, planning for death –or a time in which we may be unable to make our own decisions about treatment –is rarely easy. But we make it easier.

By supporting the residents of local care homes –as well as a variety of life-limited patients within the local community - the charity is helping people like Alice reclaim something that is so often mystified and muddled by societal fears and taboos.

With the peace of mind this affords not only to them, but to their families, the residents of care homes across Dartford, Swanley, and Gravesend can forget about dying, and get back to what really matters –*living!*

For further information on #DyingMatters please keep an eye on <https://www.mynewsdesk.com/uk/ellenor>

We are **ellenor**, a charity funded by the generosity of our local community, offering the best care and support to families facing terminal illness in Kent. We are the **only** charity in the county that provides hospice care for people of all ages – babies, children and adults - and their families. This includes pain and symptom relief, end of life care, respite, bereavement support and emotional and spiritual care.

Our Children's Hospice Care, formerly known as chYps, is provided in the comfort of the family home and spans across North and West Kent and the London Borough of Bexley. Adults living in Gravesham, Dartford and Swanley, receive care in their place of choice, including their own homes, at our Hospice in Gravesend and in local care homes.

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