

Care home quality indicator development

Outline of a research project
funded by the NIHR School for
Social Care Research

Can a quality indicator be developed, based on the Adult Social Care Outcomes Toolkit (ASCOT), at the care home level?

There is a need for clear summary information about care home quality. Currently, there is no way for older people, their families or local authority staff who commission or monitor services to draw on information about existing residents' care-related quality of life.

The way quality is measured, monitored and reported in care homes in England is a topic frequently debated. In the past, the regulator awarded care homes a star rating to encourage them to strive for quality and help the public see which homes were meeting standards, but this stopped in 2010. The Care Quality Commission is looking into developing a new rating, and some specific information is being made available on a new government care comparison website (NHS choices). However, there is still no summary measure that focuses on how well care homes provide care that supports the quality of life of residents, which some might consider fundamentally important.

The Personal Social Services Research Unit at the University of Kent have developed a toolkit for measuring social care related quality of life: the Adult Social Care Outcomes Toolkit (ASCOT). This project is the first step in developing ASCOT into a care home level quality indicator.

This project

- will develop a draft care home quality indicator and toolkit based on residents' social care related quality of life.

It aims to

- adapt the current care home version of the ASCOT (at the individual level) into a draft home level measure, including data collection guidance, definitions of the quality of life criteria to be measured and scoring system
- identify how potential users and stakeholders would want to use the toolkit and findings, and their views about desirable features of the instrument and resulting scores
- test the measure in two care homes for older people.



Improving the evidence base for
adult social care practice

WHAT IS THE CONTEXT?

In adult social care the importance of measuring people's outcomes, wellbeing and quality of life to support service evaluation and planning has been emphasised by researchers and accepted by policymakers and service providers for some time. Work in this area has developed considerably with the development of measures of service users' perceptions, experiences and views for research, economic evaluation and monitoring purposes. National desired outcomes frameworks have been developed for adult social care (ASCOF), along with frameworks for the NHS and public health, to help councils and the government benchmark outcomes and measure progress in delivering them against nationally comparable information. The national regulator, the Care Quality Commission, has also implemented a new outcomes focused set of standards for quality and safety.

To aid choices about care and incentivise quality improvement, the government has launched a portal on the NHS and social care information website: www.nhs.uk. This portal draws together 'high-quality' information, including information from the regulator, on the quality and effectiveness of individual care homes. Existing and planned quality marks, such as those of My Home Life, the Dementia Care and Support Compact and the planned NICE quality standards, are intended to be included, along with the views of service users and their families, and specific information from providers on issues such as falls, staff training and turnover, medication errors and pressure sores.

Historically, there has been relatively little publicly available information about the quality of individual care homes and currently there is no summary quality rating to help people compare providers as there is in the United States (five star rating is available on Nursing Home Compare at www.medicare.gov/nursinghomecompare). The Care Quality Commission's decision to stop awarding star ratings when it introduced its new system for registration and standards was met by disappointment within the sector; the ratings were regarded as an

The ASCOT outcome domains

The eight areas of quality of life making up the ASCOT Toolkit are:

- control over daily life
- personal cleanliness and comfort
- food and drink
- accommodation cleanliness and comfort
- personal safety
- social participation
- occupation
- dignity

encouragement to pursue high quality and have it recognised. The European Union Cross Border Care Collaboration study has explored people's preferences for different care home quality indicators. It found that the three indicators most frequently identified as most useful included a theoretical measure of residents' quality of life, the percentage of residents who feel staff treat them with courtesy and respect, and the percentage of relatives or carers who think the home is a pleasant place to be.

ASCOT

The Adult Social Care Outcomes Toolkit (ASCOT) launched in June 2010, measures service users' outcomes in eight domains of social care related quality of life (see box above and www.PSSRU.ac.uk/ASCOT). It offers a variety of approaches to measuring outcomes including a multi-method approach to evaluating the outcomes for residents of care homes.

The ASCOT multi-method approach to measuring individual resident outcomes in care homes drew on a large scale study of care homes for older people and people with learning disabilities. Feedback has been extremely positive and local council quality monitoring teams have expressed an interest in using it during their routine inspections.

Research project outline

ASCOT provides a framework for measuring quality in terms of outcomes that could be developed to provide a care home level rating of residents' social care related quality of life (SCRQoL). This would help meet the need for a useful summary measure of care home quality and fit within the national and local policy emphasis on focusing on the outcomes of services for users. Social care related quality of life is the first over-arching measure within the national 2011/12 ASCOF.

HOW WILL THE PROJECT WORK?

STAGE 1: Developmental phase

The team will explore how the work that has been done at the level of the individual care home resident can be meaningfully translated to the care home level. Domain levels will be adapted accordingly and a suitable methodology and scoring system proposed.

Alongside this, the team will map and locate the ASCOT toolkit/domains to existing philosophies of care and other quality frameworks for care homes. This will clarify how it differs and complements other approaches to conceptualising, promoting and measuring quality and how these quality frameworks might lead to better outcomes, as measured by the proposed home level measure.

STAGE 2: Consultations with stakeholders

Two workshop days will be held with a mixed audience of stakeholders including (a) local authorities (in particular quality monitoring teams and commissioners), (b) the care homes regulator (Care Quality Commission), and (c) care home providers and interest groups. These will explore the demand for the proposed home level tool, and identify desirable functions, features and factors to consider in terms of methodology.

STAGE 3: Development and testing

Based on feedback and information gathered through consultation the project will revisit and revise the draft instrumentation and

scoring system and submit this, with a proposed methodology, to the Social Care Research Ethics Committee before testing.

The team aims to pilot the draft measure in 2–3 care homes. Improvements and changes will be made to the measure and methodology throughout this stage.

In order to test and evaluate the home level measure the project will invite a potential user of the home level approach (for example, a local authority Quality Monitoring officer) to rate a home with a researcher present. This will enable the researcher to make notes about the difficulties/issues with the methodology/scoring system encountered during its use to evaluate its 'usability'.

This project is linked to another SSCR-funded project*, where the project team will be exploring potential lay users' views of what issues need to be taken into account to help make the proposed new care home quality indicator useful and easy to use.

Project publications

The main output of this project will be a draft measure with guidance and explanatory notes that will be ready for further testing in future research.

In addition to an academic article reporting on this work, there will be: an ongoing web presence for the project making use of the SSCR, PSSRU and ASCOT websites; web-based and traditional printed outputs – including an executive summary; conference presentations; and general media coverage, as appropriate.

* "Developing a care home quality indicator based on residents' social care related quality of life: formats and interpretation of results" led by Dr Jacquetta Holder at the PSSRU (Kent)

Research project outline

HOW DOES THE PROJECT FIT THE AIMS OF THE SCHOOL FOR SOCIAL CARE RESEARCH?

This project is concerned with developing a care home quality indicator based on residents' social care related quality of life (SCRQoL). This will help meet the need for a useful summary measure of care home quality and fit within the national and local policy emphasis on focusing on the outcomes of services for users.

The adaptation of the care homes multi-method Adult Social Care Outcomes Toolkit (ASCOT) into a mechanism that could be adopted by local authorities and providers as part of their own quality monitoring should encourage the use of outcomes measures to improve care practice. It will also add value to an already successful tool.

The research is the first step towards developing a measure that can be tested in a wide range of care homes in the future.

The Research Team

The team brings together a number of experienced academics at the University of Kent's Personal Social Services Research Unit (PSSRU).

Ann-Marie Towers, Research Fellow, is Principal Investigator and will oversee the project and carry out the initial adaptation of the ASCOT toolkit and domains. She was one of the main researchers on the HM Treasury-funded PSSRU research project, Measuring Outcomes of Public Service Users (MOPSU), which led to the development of the multi-method approach for measuring outcomes in care homes and has an in-depth knowledge of the ASCOT.

Jacquetta Holder, Research Fellow, will map the ASCOT domains to other frameworks and philosophies of care in care homes, and contribute to the consultation workshops. She will lead on the linked project involving potential lay users of the proposed new care home quality indicator (including relatives and carers of care home residents, older people with experience of housing and social care needs and adults who may in future need to choose a care home for an older relative).

Nick Smith, Research Officer, will assist in the developmental work to adapt the ASCOT toolkit and mixed-methods approach for use as a quality monitoring indicator.

All project team members will contribute to the workshops, and be involved in the production of outputs and communication of results.

Project title:
Developing a care home quality indicator based on residents' social care related quality of life: adaption of the Adult Social Care Outcomes Toolkit (ASCOT) from the individual to the home level

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