

# Care home quality indicator interpretation

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



Improving the evidence base for  
adult social care practice

## How can we make a care home quality indicator easy to understand and use?

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' social 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 gave care homes a star rating to encourage care homes to strive for quality and help the public see which care 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 has developed a toolkit for measuring social care related quality of life: the Adult Social Care Outcomes Toolkit (ASCOT). This project is part of some work that is developing ASCOT into a care home level quality indicator.

### This project

- will consult potential lay users about the proposed care home quality measure and explore alternative presentation formats for the results to feed into the development of the measure before it is tested in a few homes in the linked project.

### It aims to

- identify potential lay users' views about how they would want to use the information, what it might cover, be based on and look like.
- review good practice guidelines for presenting statistical information
- develop alternative presentations of the results of the measure, including visual displays and verbal descriptions of scores
- test the presentation of results with potential user populations to see how easy it is to understand.

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## 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 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 has also implemented a new outcomes focused set of standards for quality and safety.

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](http://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 encouragement to pursue high quality and have it recognised.

To aid choices about care provider and incentivise quality improvement, the government has launched a portal on the NHS and social care information website: [www.nhs.uk](http://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. However none of these sites includes a summary measure that focuses on how well care homes provide care that supports the quality of life of residents in line with the policy focus on services delivering measurable outcomes for those they are designed to support.

The European Union Cross Border Care Collaboration study ([www.ecabeurope.eu](http://www.ecabeurope.eu)) 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, 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.

To help people compare care homes it is important that quality information is easy to process and understand 'at a glance'; decisions to move to residential care are often made during a crisis and under stringent time constraints. Research on health care decisions highlights the importance of focusing on how information is presented and conveyed. Presentation can be as influential as content. It can affect interpretation. Particular formats can be perceived differently depending on people's numeracy and interest in the data. For example, people with high levels of numeracy may distrust summary measures and want to see what they are based on, and people interested in identifying risk may like 'traffic light' coding, but others may find this complicates the meaning of information when risk is not their main concern.

The Adult Social Care Outcomes Toolkit (ASCOT) launched in June 2010, measures service user's outcomes in eight areas of social care related quality of life (see [www.PSSRU.ac.uk/ASCOT](http://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. This approach to measuring individual resident outcomes in care homes drew on a large scale study of care homes for older people

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and people with learning disabilities. Feedback has been extremely positive and local council quality monitoring teams have expressed an interest in using a care home level version of it during their routine inspections. This project will contribute to the initial stages of a development project\* that explores whether a new care home level quality measure can be developed based on adapting the ASCOT from the individual resident to care home level.

### HOW WILL THE PROJECT WORK?

#### STAGE 1: Consultations with potential lay users

Group interviews will be held with potential lay users of care home quality information, including relatives and carers of older people living in care homes who have already had to select a care home, relatives and carers of older people who have experience of social care services and support, and adults who may have to help arrange residential care for an older relative in future. Groups will be recruited through existing local groups in one council area. Issues discussed will include expectations of what a measure of care home quality based on residents' quality of life might show, what it might be based on, the clarity of the proposed domain descriptions (developed in the linked study) and desirable features of reported results.

#### STAGE 2: Developmental phase

The project team will develop alternative visual presentations of results (including explanation of overall measure, definitions, verbal descriptions of scores, labels, symbols, graphs and combinations of options), drawing on recommendations for presenting statistical, and health and social care information, feedback from a public and patient involvement panel, and on the purposes that the information might support (quality improvement,

monitoring, choice) explored during the consultations carried out here, and in the existing linked study.

#### STAGE 3: Testing

Individual cognitive interviews with potential user populations will gather feedback on the visual presentation and wording. Cognitive interview testing is useful for testing survey questions and will help identify challenges and potential improvements related to the communication and interpretation of the results of the proposed new measure. Participants will be recruited from one council area and include a small number (around five) of people in the following groups: older people, care staff involved in supporting older people with social care needs, extra care housing tenants (as older people who have experience of housing and support needs), younger relatives/adult children of older people who have or may have to choose a care home. Information will be collected about self-reported numeracy, internet use, and computer ownership.

#### STAGE 4: Review

Group 'feedback meetings' will be held with the people who took part in the group interviews to review the prototype measure and result formats following revision after the consultations and cognitive interviews.

#### Project publications

The results of the study will feed into the larger project mentioned above and help develop a draft care home quality measure with explanatory notes that will be ready for further testing in future research. A short summary report of the findings will be produced at the end of the study for those who took part and the work will be reported in an academic article and presented at conferences.

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\* The linked project "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" led by Ann-Marie Towers at the PSSRU (Kent) is developing an initial version of the proposed indicator, consulting potential professional users of the measure and testing it in a few care homes.

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

This project is 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).

*Dr Jacquetta Holder*, Research Fellow, is the Principal Investigator and will oversee the project, lead on the focus group and cognitive interview design and analysis and carry out some of the focus groups. She is also involved in the linked project consulting potential professional users of the proposed new measure.

*Ann-Marie Towers*, Research Fellow, will lead on developing initial descriptions of the new measure, the domains and interpretations of the results. She is the Principal Investigator on the linked project and will be carrying 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 (MOPUSU), 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.

*Elizabeth Welch*, Research Officer, will lead on reviewing recommendations for presenting statistical information and facilitating the focus groups.

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: formats and interpretation of results

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Budget:  
£30,000

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