What do older people want from their care services?
Service User & Carer Perspectives: Emerging findings from the Longitudinal Care Work Study (LoCS)

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Background

• Social care relationships valued by older people
• Older people’s involvement in developing services, quality assurance and research is gaining momentum
• Many older people using social care encounter multiple workers
Gaps in understanding

- Presumption of what services older people want
- “Users” largely non-specific group
  - Over-generalized, over-homogenized views
- “User research” tends to depict what older people want in future services rather than ones they currently receive
- Dominant voices of people from younger disability movement have shaped services more than older people’s voices with high level needs
Research questions & methodology

- Characteristics older people appreciate in their care workers
- Role of training as affecting worker
- Best way of choosing a care worker

What methodology?
- Observation and detailed responses
- Photo elicitation techniques, followed by qualitative interviews
What do these pictures mean to you?

What is the person doing – how would you feel if someone helped you in the same way?

What the person being supported looks like – relaxed or nervous, happy or sad?

What do you think about the worker’s appearance? Too formal/informal?

How do you think the worker and the person being supported get on?

How confident would you feel if this person came to see you?
Research Sample

- 4 sites in England – North West, Midlands, South and Inner city
- Range of settings – day centres, home care services, care homes

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Findings
Innate qualities valued

- Innate qualities of individual care workers valued
- Personality – respectful attitude, friendly, personable, naturally compassionate, genuine and warm

- Use of humour
- Attitude to work – reliable, committed and sincere

“If you don’t care for people, you can’t do a good job. I always feel that. If you like people and you are caring, you do a wonderful job. Money is secondary” (Female day centre user)
Enabling/supporting

• Carers seen as source of support
• Some talked of their role as enabling rather than merely doing
  “encouraging you to be more independent” (Male user of day centre for older people)
• Flip side was feeling pressure of not performing as well as they ‘ought’ to

“I’ve had carers in the past who have failed miserably in terms of they have been nice to begin with and then they have got a bit fed up with me after a while” (Male user of mental health day centre)
Did race/ethnicity matter?

• Except for 1, all service users and carers said it didn’t

• More important for both service user and care worker to be open minded and not prejudiced in any way

• However, many emphasized that good, open, honest communication was essential – with 2 highlighting lack of common English language can hamper this
Care worker – User relationship

• Foundation of respect and trust
• Mutuality acknowledged

“The respect of it. And likewise back. If I’m respected, I respect back in the same way. But if I’m spoken to like grumpy or “you don’t do this, you don’t do that,” well I’m afraid I speak back in exactly the same way...” (Female care home resident)
“You have to have that assertiveness with carers (care workers). They have to know that you know what you want. And that’s actually very hard to achieve. I think after three to four years, I’ve more or less got that. But that’s really important, the balance. But also you have to be kind and nice enough that actually when you get a really good carer, you want to keep them, and they want to be with you. It’s a very weird mixture of not quite friends, but very close and intimate, but as well maintaining your distance, that they know that you’re a client. It’s a fine balance.” (Female day centre user)
Importance of training?

Essential Vs Preferred but not essential
Training should be starting point of a good care worker

Being ‘naturally caring’ more important

“you can train skills, but you can’t train attitudes.” (Female older carer of older relative receiving domiciliary care)
Two service users felt strongly that training had gone too far and may be damaging caring personalities or attitudes:

“If you set too many barriers to people entering the profession in the first place, where really you shouldn’t be looking for paper qualifications, really” (Male day centre user)

“I think we’ve gone too far in terms of training. I think even 10 years ago when I was first disabled, there would be volunteers taking you to hospital, and it worked really well. Now, they have to be ambulance drivers taking you, and the consequence is I have great difficulty getting transport, because you have to jump through literally so many hoops, tick so many forms, and it’s hard to get transport” (Female day centre user)
How would older people choose a care worker?

• Basic starting points of respect and safety (DBS check known about if not in detail – ‘police check’)
• Like they would wish to be treated, or how they would treat their parent/grandparent was common sentiment (even by older people)
• Personal approach appreciated: “I’m not just a statistic” (Female day centre user)
  – Resented anonymity and lack of anyone specific to ring with problems
• Some appreciated having a personal contact – at times someone whom they could employ in this role
Implications

• Importance of asking experts by experience
• Methods – responding to frailty and possible apprehension of making judgements
• Different views among older people
• Possibly different views from care providing and commissioning organisations eg of training, boundaries, ‘getting on together’
**Disclaimer**

The Social Care Workforce Research Unit receives funding from the Department of Health. The views expressed in this presentation are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Department of Health.

**Thanks to**

- Service users who agreed to be interviewed
- Transcribers Laptop Confidential and Voicescript
- Unit Advisory Group
- And you for listening!

**Acknowledgements**