

Supporting people to live and die well: The challenge for social work

Demographic change has ensured that end of life care occupies a centre stage position in government policy and presents a major challenge for health and social care services. We are seeing a prolonged period at the end of life in which levels of frailty and illness shade imperceptibly into the acute dying phase. Most people say that they would prefer to die at home and at the same time shifting and reciprocal caring arrangements are leading to learning disabled adults and older partners supporting family members receiving palliative care.

This paper will report on Phase 1 of the roll-out of the National End of Life Care Programme's (NEoLCP) social care framework, *Supporting People to Live and Die Well*. The Framework, developed by the NEoLCP's Social Care Advisory Group, comprised of senior social care professionals from policy, practice and education sectors and carer representatives, was published in July 2010 and has the active support of ADASS. Eight test-sites were commissioned, one of which explores the impact of an EOLC lead social worker and the training required to upskill mainstream social workers.

It is crucial that current reforms in social work and social work education take account of the significance of end of life care for adult social care, yet we have seen little engagement so far from either mainstream social work or social work education, which together have represented a tiny minority of the 1600+ social care workers attending the roadshows, numbers from social work education being particularly low. Specialist palliative care social workers continue to be involved in the latter stages of the end of life care pathway for those people in hospice and palliative care services, but evidence that end of life care planning needs to take place much earlier if people's wishes are to be recorded and reflected in their care, requires social workers to incorporate this aspect into mainstream assessment and care planning processes. Evidence emerging from the social care test-sites indicates an alarming lack of knowledge and skills (or the confidence to exercise skills) amongst qualified social workers to equip them to engage with end of life care issues. The NEoLCP therefore plans to target social work in the second phase of implementation.