

Relocation, portability and social care practice

KEY POINTS FROM THE RESEARCH

- When people with social care needs move to new local authorities, it involves managing a complex set of circumstances, interrelated needs and challenges in addition to those experienced by people not using care services. People who relocate, and/or their carers, often have to address several aspects of their care and support simultaneously, as a result of moving locality. This means that they must negotiate and secure support services from numerous individuals and agencies within a short period of time. Prior to moving, people are not always known to anyone in the new local authority.
 - Different local authorities offer differing kinds of support services and interpret legislation and guidance in varying ways. People may receive varying levels of support – better or worse – when they move or they may even become ineligible for local authority funded social care support in the area they move to. Consequently, the process of relocation is associated with several risks, uncertainties and unknowns. For some people the process of relocating their care can lead to additional anxiety and experiencing a loss of control over their support.
 - Social care practitioners who are likely to support people who relocate, appear to have good insights into the complex and challenging situation of moving. Some are very aware of the problems that might occur over the transitions and changes involved.
- Moving locality can be a difficult and stressful time for anyone. For people with local authority funded social care support, the challenges may be magnified. This study explored the experiences of people who have moved and relocated their social care support to a new local authority. The study also examined what social care practitioners do in helping people to relocate.
- Effective practice in supporting people who move seems to focus on careful coordination, regular and open communication and efficient and timely action across a range of agencies. The findings suggest that this focus will help to synchronise the multiple elements concerned and promote some continuity of care, particularly at the point that people actually move.
 - People need to find out about numerous new services, systems and agencies and initiate and secure those they need as quickly as they can. Organising new social care services is likely to involve meticulous planning, careful timing, extensive preparation and assertive prompting of agencies and practitioners.
 - Despite the evident insight and awareness of practitioners, and the careful planning and preparation of people who move, it is likely that some things will not go to plan. For example, people reported frustrating delays and gaps in service provision. It is vital for both the people moving and the relevant practitioners to have contingency plans in mind for unforeseen events and crises. This might mean, for example, negotiating with a local care agency

The study represents independent research funded by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) School for Social Care Research (SSCR). The views expressed are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the NIHR, SSCR, Department of Health, or NHS.

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to provide emergency home care support in the event of short-term problems with recruiting personal assistants, paid via an individual's direct payments, since this type of funding may take time to 'move'.

BACKGROUND

Several government documents have recently highlighted the 'problem of portability' and The Care Act 2014 seeks to improve arrangements to support individuals and promote continuity of care as they move. However, prior to this study, there was little or no evidence of the experiences of people who seek to relocate and/or the social care practice of local authority staff providing support with this relocation.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The research therefore aimed to address the following questions:

- What are the experiences of people who receive adult social care support or funding who move between local authorities?
- How do social care practitioners facilitate the portability of social care support or funding, and support adults who receive social care to relocate between local authorities?

FINDINGS

Interviews with practitioners suggest that they infrequently support people to relocate (some had little or no experience of such work). Additionally, identifying and recruiting people with experience of moving was extremely challenging. Taken together, this appears to suggest that relatively few people in receipt of social care are moving across local authority boundaries. However, it is not clear how many people would like to move but are deterred by the perceived barriers and challenges.

The interviews with practitioners and people with experience of relocation highlighted some common challenges for both groups. These included:

1. People who relocate have a wide range of needs which must be addressed as they move

Although the research focussed primarily on

social care needs and support, participants identified a range of additional needs, which must be addressed simultaneously, as individuals move. These may include needs associated with health, housing, work, study, equipment and adaptations, carers' needs, finances and benefits. Both practitioners and people relocating will need to contact and liaise with a wide range of agencies and individuals. Consequently, practitioners identified that a key part of their role was to coordinate the communication with this range of agencies.

2. Time, timings and the potential for delays are significant aspects of the relocation process

The breadth of needs to be addressed and the amount of planning and preparation required, mean that sufficient time needs to be available. For example, practitioners highlighted the importance of receiving enough notice that people are moving. They were very aware of the need to begin new assessments, as a priority, in order to ensure that the person's needs were known and met on arrival in their new authority.

Despite practitioners' awareness of the importance of time and the potential for delays, people with experience of moving reported examples of local authorities which were slow to respond and carry out assessments, even where they believed they had given sufficient notice. As a result, some people reported experiencing gaps and a lack of continuity of care and support as they moved. There were examples of people who had had to manage without support, or had used their own resources to bridge temporary gaps.

3. Differences between local authorities as a significant challenge within relocation

Participants highlighted the differences between local authorities, in respect of the services available, their interpretation of eligibility criteria, their cultures and priorities, and their charging policies. Therefore, when people move they may receive different types and levels of support (with the potential for increased or reduced levels of support). Practitioners were concerned to prepare those moving, and carers, for the possibility that they would encounter important differences

in the support offered by their new local authority.

4. Relocation is a significant transition and can impact on the wellbeing of those who move

Practitioners were clearly aware of relocation as a significant transition for those involved. People who had moved highlighted a range of negative emotions they had experienced related to their care arrangements during the relocation process (for example, stress, anxiety and fear). Some participants considered that the experience of moving had had a negative impact on their physical and emotional health and wellbeing.

5. People who relocate may feel disempowered and experience a lack of involvement and control

Practitioners consistently reported that they would work in partnership with people moving, their families and their carers. This included, for example, seeking their consent for all actions taken. However, people who moved and/or their carers sometimes felt disempowered and experienced a lack of control and involvement within the relocation process. They reported that the process and associated systems could appear inflexible and unresponsive and therefore that they had to work hard to 'get around' the system. This included much prompting and chasing things up to ensure that the process was moving forward.

IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL CARE PRACTICE

The findings highlight the importance of social work and social care practice which emphasises the following:

Careful coordination across a range of agencies within the two local authority areas concerned, ensuring that all agencies involved are well informed, understand what needs to happen, and respond in a timely and effective manner.

Close contact and communication throughout the relocation process between practitioners from the two local authorities, and between practitioners and the person relocating.

Anticipation of potential gaps, delays and problems, and the development of

ABOUT THE STUDY

The study was undertaken between January 2012 and April 2014 by Dave Marsland and Caroline White from the University of Hull, and Jill Manthorpe from King's College London. It had three stages:

1. A scoping review of the UK literature published since 1995, including grey literature. Databases and journals were searched for literature concerning the portability of social care, and other related issues. An article has been written summarising the literature.
2. Interviews with social work practitioners from three local authorities. Interviews were structured around two vignettes (fictional case studies). Practitioners were asked how they would support individuals to move into, and out of, their local authority. Twenty practitioners took part in the interviews.
3. Interviews with social care recipients who had moved across local authority boundaries in the previous three years. Twelve interviews were conducted; ten with people in receipt of social care and three with family members who had supported relatives to move (this included one joint interview with a family member and person in receipt of social care support). Participants were recruited from across England. All were in receipt of social care, or had received social care support at the time of their move.

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contingency plans to address such gaps. This enables better continuity for those moving at the point of transition.

Close social work support through the transition period for the person moving. This includes a proactive and dynamic process of monitoring and reassessing by the new local authority to respond to changing needs and circumstances and ensure that care arrangements are working as planned.

Awareness of the time required to support relocation. This includes ensuring that referrals are allocated and acted upon quickly and that practitioners are enabled to invest the amount of time required across the short term.

Recognition of the significance of the transition for those moving and the stress and anxiety they may experience.