

13 February 2007: Briefing note

**PANORAMA OFFERS 'ALARMIST' VIEW OF CARE INDUSTRY
SAYS SYMPONIA**

On Monday Evening, 12 February 2007, the BBC's **Panorama** Programme "Please look after Mum" highlighted the issue of elder abuse, focusing on two care homes in Halifax, West Yorkshire. The programme, hosted by Jeremy Vine, portrayed a number of harrowing personal accounts depicting the neglect, and abuse of older people placed in care homes.

National advice network **Symponia**, the care fees and financial planning specialist for the over 65s, is accusing Panorama of biased reporting. **The following is a statement by Janet Davies, joint founder and managing director of the network and herself a former nurse. She says:**

"Even *one* case of neglect, or the physical or mental abuse of an elderly person in 21st Century Britain, is one too many. However, the Panorama film was quite alarmist in that it focused on two care homes out of a possible 17,000 in this country.

One of Symponia's key objectives is to improve the quality of life for older people and their families and as such we wish to make a number of points in direct response to the programme:

- Pressure sores like the ones shown are more a result of bad nursing than willful abuse and sadly these are as likely to occur in NHS hospitals as in care homes.
- Referring to a residents' day room as the "loopy lounge" appears disrespectful but in any industry there are insider terms that are not used in the public domain and sometimes, black humour is used to overcome miserable and stressful circumstances. This is not unique to the care industry, for instance anyone who has boarded a plane will have been called SLB or "self loading baggage" by airport staff.
- A wide disparity exists between the way in which children and vulnerable adults are protected. Symponia supports whole-heartedly all moves to bring the rights and protection of the elderly in line with the rights of children.

Placing a relative in a care home is one of the most difficult things a person will ever have to do and most people with aging parents dread the thought. That said, there is a great deal that families can do to select the right care home, giving them peace of mind, safe in the knowledge that their relative is being offered compassionate and skilled care in a protected and kind environment.

The Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) will be introducing a new way of grading care homes, by awarding them with a star rating (like that of hotels) ranging from 1 for poor up to 4 for excellent. Until then Symponia recommends the following checklist when choosing a care home. *[Note: abbreviated here; a full version is available at <http://www.symponia.co.uk/chooseahome.php> .]*

1. What to look for?
 - Does it feel like a home?
 - Does it smell clean and fresh?
 - Are fresh flowers provided?
 - Do the residents appear content?
 - Can mum stay for a week or so before we commit?
 - Do I need to book an appointment before arriving/ if so, why is that?
2. Rooms/Facilities
 - Are there en-suite facilities? If not, how many people share a bathroom?
 - Can Mum bring her own furniture?
 - Can she have a Television in her room?
 - Can she have a telephone in her room?
 - Does a hairdresser visit the home?
 - Is there a laundry service for mum's clothes?
3. Sitting Rooms
 - Is there a choice of sitting room?
 - Is the furniture comfortable?
 - Can mum stay up as long as she likes?
 - Is there a separate TV lounge?
 - Is there a DVD player? Do you show films on a regular basis?
4. Dining Rooms
 - Do you have a dining room?
 - Are all meals served at the table?
 - Is there a choice of dining room?
 - Can mum eat in her room if she wants to?
5. Meals & Drinks
 - Is there a choice of food at each meal?
 - Do you offer special diets?
 - Do you keep a Kosher kitchen?
 - Can we come for a lunch before we decide?
 - Can we join mum at meal times?
 - Can mum give private lunches/dinners?
 - What happens on special occasions like Christmas & Easter?
 - Are warm drinks served in mum's room?
 - Could she make her own drinks?
6. Visitors
 - Is there a limit on how many visitors mum can have?

- Can they come at any (reasonable) time?
 - Is it ok to bring the baby?
 - Can people ever stay over?
7. Activities
- Do you have an activities coordinator?
 - Do you organise trips out?
 - Does the home arrange entertainment?
 - Can mum play bingo?
 - Can mum choose to "not join in"?
 - Does the home have a computer?
 - Can mum watch films?

Dismantling a life, especially that of a close and much loved relative is never easy and care homes will never figure on anyone's wish-list. But modern care homes do take the protection of vulnerable adults (also known as POVA) very seriously indeed and many run dedicated POVA training.

So in conclusion, Symponia believes that Panorama has created a negative and inaccurate picture of the care industry and its many dedicated professionals."

Nobody is born old...

A DVD called "What do you see?" featuring Virginia McKenna in the lead role as an elderly woman placed in a care home following a stroke, is used by many care homes across the country as a training aide and demonstrates the previous lives of elderly residents. See <http://www.symponia.co.uk/dvd.php> for further details or to get a copy of the DVD.

Your local Symponia member is Stephen Wilkinson of IFA firm Charles Wilkinson Financial Planning Ltd and they can be contacted on 01904 656104

ENDS

Please contact :

Jeremy Davies / Janet Davies
Symponia
Tel : 01789 774595
Email : info@symponia.co.uk

Stephen Wilkinson
Charles Wilkinson Financial Planning Ltd
Tel 01904 656104

Notes to Editors

Symponia (which is the Greek word for compassion) was created by Jeremy and Janet Davies who have 20 years' combined experience in long term care. Founded in January 2005 Symponia is committed to raising standards and increasing training and compliance levels within the long term care advice industry.

- All members are qualified IFAs who are selected by invitation only, after a rigorous selection process designed to make sure that members have the right people skills as well as technical competence.
- Each member must pass a bespoke written examination every year. The exam is in addition to FSA requirements and tests market knowledge as well as technical competence. In addition to basic qualifications, advisers must have attained the industry benchmark examination known as CF8.
- Members are subject to a Code of Practice and Conduct, and to a Customer Charter, which lays down strict service standards that the member IFA must meet.