

PRESS BRIEFING NOTE: FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

14 May 2008

**SYMPONIA APPLAUDS SOCIAL CARE REFORMS GOING TO
THE TOP OF THE POLITICAL AGENDA**

Prime Minister Brown's vow to make social care for the elderly fairer and more affordable has been applauded by **Symponia**, the national affinity group for care fees planning and financial advice for the elderly. The prime minister's speech marks the end of a six month public consultation focussed on the future of social care in Britain and puts care for the elderly at the top of Britain's political agenda.

Stephen Wilkinson of Charles Wilkinson Financial Planning Ltd, a care fees specialist financial planner and Symponia member for Harrogate, York and North Yorkshire responds:

"The case for the reform of social care in the UK cannot be overstated. At last, the Government is being proactive in addressing the dire need for a fairer funding system that will help to alleviate the terrible distress and anxiety suffered by millions of families every year as they try to face the nature, effect and implications of placing an elderly relative in a care home. Dismantling a person's life will never be an easy process, but the added financial worries, which often include the selling of what is often a multi-generational family home, can be extremely upsetting.

"I welcome the Government decision to instigate a national debate on the future of care and support and hope that everyone will have their say. To find out more visit www.careandsupport.direct.gov.uk

"Without radical reform, ministers are projecting a £6bn shortfall in England alone in twenty years' time. Under the current system an awful lot of people risk losing their entire lifetime's financial achievements, which, given the dramatic social changes and hard struggles they have witnessed throughout their lives is totally unacceptable.

"Even in Scotland, the system is not clear. Contrary to popular belief (and political rhetoric), Scotland does have - and implements - a means-tested system, although people with assets outside the thresholds do receive weekly contribution towards their personal care (£149) and a separate payment for nursing care (£67).

"Symponia believes that the system can be improved in a number of ways, including:

- The creation of a greater parity throughout the UK.
- Increasing the current upper means test threshold limit to a realistic level of £100,000, this will reflect the “real” cost of an average house in the UK, which is the **one** specific and hugely emotive fact behind the current unfairness.
- Encourage younger people to plan for (or at least be aware of) the future. Placing a relative in a care home is often about crisis management. If people had the luxury of time to plan ahead and establish a cost effective, stable and genuinely reassuring insurance style plan (or even a plan of action) the immediate aftermath and financial crisis can be averted.
 - The time is right for a mini revolution in the future care fees planning market. Several companies are already facing into the wind and want to be in a position to make a real difference.
 - We have learned from the plans of the past, and all new policies need to need to be “future proof” and do exactly what it says on the tin.
 - The government can help by providing an additional incentive, for instance, tax relief on premiums or a reworking of the 1996 Conservation proposal of a “ring fenced/pound-for-pound” system.

“However, blame cannot lie with the government alone and as citizens we must place some of the blame on ourselves. We have not revered our elderly enough in the past and our perceived busy lifestyles have created the need for care homes in the first place, which is an alien concept to many other countries; in Greece for instance, care homes don’t exist. So until we encourage younger people to view older, poorly people as a worthwhile member of the neighbourhood, perhaps by visiting care homes on a regular basis, our elderly and vulnerable citizens will always receive the thin end of the wedge.”

Stephen concludes: “In the meantime, the need for clear, accessible and expert financial advice has never been greater. As a responsible and ethical group, Symponia is currently in dialogue with other groups engaged in care for the elderly and we will be announcing a new initiative shortly that will make a tangible difference to families facing the dilemma of funding the care needs for elderly relatives.”

Symponia has members across the UK. To find out more call 01789 774595 or visit <http://www.symponia.co.uk>

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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. All members are subject to a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. Symponia is the only advice group to carry out this procedure.
- 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. Symponia is the only advice group to insist on this qualification.
- Members are subject to a Code of Practice and Conduct, and to a Customer Charter, which lays down strict service standards that the IFA must meet.
- Member IFAs pay an annual fee only (payable monthly). There is no commission split of business related fee.
- Symponia acts as an intermediary between care home providers and care fee specialist IFAs, providing the latter with introductions to providers in their area.
- Symponia is the only care fees planning advice group that has genuine national representation across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It is the only group to guarantee face to face consultation for clients in every part of the country.