

Providers debate management issues at Barclays round table

In mid-July, senior managers from 14 provider organisations met to discuss survival strategies and plans for future growth and development. Chaired by PAUL BIRLEY, head of healthcare at **Barclays Commercial Bank**, the discussion forms the basis for a series of three articles in this and the following two issues of *Caring Times*. This first article in the series focuses on management issues.

Paul Birley asked the operators what they thought the most important care home management issues were. Discussion quickly focused on the questions of care home managers' autonomy and financial awareness.

Eric Prescott, chief executive of Leonard Cheshire Disability said he had been surprised by providers' lack of attention to detail, particularly when they were running a number of facilities.

"If there is any degree of autonomy within those facilities, there are the usual chiefdoms and practices that are not in line with the management rule set, so some bad practices are allowed to emerge," he said. Ravi Gidar, a director of Goldcare, agreed:

"My company has expanded but the homes have been run as single autonomous units," he said. "It has taken us about five years to get them all to work to some sort of method and to achieve qualities and procedures where one home is no different from another.

"There is the argument that a resident in one home may want something completely different from another resident in another home and that, while you can put in set procedures for say pharmacy and dispensing, you can't have such a defined procedure for actual care."

Goldcare's finance director, Jon Evens, said care should not be so uniform that the customers are seen as not getting choice.

"As a sector we have to move and indeed are moving towards putting the customer/client/service user first.

"I think we are talking about back office roles particularly because all back office roles are concerned with systems and processes and must be consistent, so that when you employ

management and accounts procedures you must be able to understand and trust them. The front line side should be about choice and flexibility and people really being given the opportunity to make decisions for themselves which is what any sort of service business needs to be driven by."

Geoff Lane, finance director for the AnselGroup/ILG said most managers running care homes didn't have a great understanding of financial matters - effectively they were all running small little businesses.

"There is much greater financial awareness in managers in most other industries," he said.

"They have it drummed into them whereas perhaps the promotion route in the care sector



Mike Parsons, founder of Barchester Healthcare (right) joined senior officers from 13 other provider groups aboard HMS Belfast.

has been 'I've been a care worker, I have become a team leader, I am a deputy and now I have got a shot at manager.' They have never had any formal training in business."

Westgate Healthcare chief executive Push Patel said many managers in the care sector were from a nursing background and are not trained to be managers.

Training

Barchester Healthcare's founder, Mike Parsons, said training was something that historically, the sector had totally under-invested in.

"It can be a highly profitable sector, but you have got to be prepared to push those profits back into training and people," said Mr Parsons. "In the longer term it is the very best thing you can do. When you have a good training programme that you have invested in, your people become loyal people. The sector has been blighted by high staff turnover. The way to reduce high staff turnover is to give people a meaningful career path."

"The issue of balancing a business brain with a caring brain is a very tricky recruitment challenge," said former Sunrise Senior Living managing director Dave Marsh.

"Can you find people who are brilliant at management? Yes, but do they care deeply? Not necessarily. I think finding that calibre of individual and attracting them to this sector, given the sort of comments that have been made about the sector, makes our jobs particularly challenging.

"I would start from the premise that setting out to run a profitable business surely starts with responding to customers' needs above everything else."

At Barclays Commercial Bank, we understand it's tough out there but one thing remains the same: our commitment to the healthcare sector. As part of our 'Turning the Corner' campaign we've developed a programme of activity to support businesses who work within the sector. From national events featuring experts sharing their insight to bi monthly care home conference calls and 'How-to' guides around the business issues you might be facing, we want to help you move your business forwards.

Listen to our next care home conference call on the 7th September 3 - 4pm, hosted by Paul Birley who'll be joined by Linda Hutchinson, Director of Registration for the Care Quality Commission, as well as Sheila Scott, CEO, National Care Association.
Call 0800 376 2548 (landline) or +44 (0)20 7075 0121 (mobile) and enter the pin number: 912725#

To find out more please visit our website at: www.barclaysturningthecorner.com or e-mail Paul Birley directly: paul.birley@barclayscorporate.com



Barclays breakfast aboard the Belfast

Attendees

Nick Apetroaie, care director, Servite Houses
Paul Birley, head of healthcare, Barclays Commercial Bank
Tony Bosley, relationship director, Barclays Commercial Bank
Alex Chiang, finance director, European Healthcare Group
Syd Coombes, managing director, Optima Care
Jon Evens, finance director, Goldcare Homes
George Fergusson, relationship director, Barclays Commercial Bank

Ravi Gidar, director, Goldcare Homes
Jon Gooding, chief executive, Retirement Villages
Om Gupta, director, Vorg Ltd
Richard Hawkins, editor-in-chief, *Caring Times*
Geoff Hodgson, editor, *Caring Times*
Barry Lambert, chief executive, BML Healthcare Ltd
Geoff Lane, finance director, The Ansel Group/ILG Ltd
Dave Marsh, former managing director of Sunrise Senior Living

Simon Morris, chief executive, Jewish Care
Ian Murchie, relationship director, Barclays Commercial Bank
Mike Parsons, founder, Barchester Healthcare
Push Patel, chief executive, Westgate Healthcare
Eric Prescott, chief executive, Leonard Cheshire Disability
Glenn Sargent, relationship director, Barclays Commercial Bank
Neil Whitehand, finance director, Excelcare