

Crisis management

Any current press story about elderly care these days comes attached with colourful clichéd metaphors of impending doom and the futility of current efforts to deal with the dramatically labelled 'ticking demographic time bomb'. Visions of asteroids hurtling towards the earth; deck chairs being rearranged on board the Titanic; Nero fiddling while Rome burns. All of these suggest an imminent catastrophic event with little hope of us being able to cope. Putting the clichés to one side, is it really as bad as all of the inflammatory articles suggest? Well, yes...actually...

Okay, let's make Private Frazer leave the room for a moment; let's park the doom and gloom and let's look at some hard facts and figures. By 2020, one fifth of the UK population will be aged 65 or over. Meanwhile, the population aged 80 and over is expected to almost double in size, reaching five million by 2031. But that's okay because we're building lots of shiny new care homes all over the UK to cater for them. Right? Well, maybe not...

The demographic trend suggests that to cope with the ageing population, we need to be adding around 9,000-10,000 new care home beds every year. Taking last year's figures, the care home development industry only delivered 5,500 new beds. So, we are only building half the number of new beds we need to. But, the added problem is (dramatic music swells) we actually closed around 8,000 older beds.

So the net result is that we lost around 2,500 beds at a time when we need to add 10,000. It appears that panic, then, is an entirely appropriate response. Perhaps Private Frazer can come back in now, but tell him to bring Corporal Jones with him, because the domiciliary care providers will tell us not to panic.

They'll say it's not all about building new care homes and that the growth in homecare and people's desire to remain in their own homes must also be a large part of the solution. However, anyone who has seen *Panorama* recently would be unlikely to take much comfort from the ability of the home care sector to provide the whole

Government needs to take the looming care bed shortage seriously, says NorthStar director **DANNY SHARPE**.

solution to the problem. No, they are just as far up the creek as we are.

For those of you who have managed to get this far in the expectation that I am about to impart some brilliant new insight to tackle this 'crisis', I can only apologise. In the light of the overwhelming evidence, I am every bit as panic stricken as the rest of the industry.

The Chancellor has thrown a couple of billion quid our way to help ease the pain and whilst it would be churlish to moan about 'only' two billion pounds, I don't think this is the whole answer. The money will certainly come in handy for the domiciliary care companies.

The fact that we are unable to provide

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homecare to our elderly neighbours because Aldi down the road offers higher wages for shelf stackers and checkout operators, says more about society than any of us care to really think about for too long.

But for those of us designing and building new care homes and all of the other models of extracare, it is incumbent on us to keep developing the models that we offer. Unless we can make extracare (and think of another name for it!) aspirational, we won't attract older people into more accessible, supported living accommodation which provides a safer



environment and, in turn, frees up much-needed housing stock for the younger generation.

But we need help too. We need central government to re-look at stamp duty. We need local authorities to take the problem seriously and create policies in their local plans to help address the huge shortfall of elderly care accommodation. They stepped up when the issue was a lack of affordable housing; they need to step up again and work with us to deliver a lot more elderly care accommodation: whether it is care, extracare or some hybrid form of CQC registered apartment/bungalow which does appear to be the way the market is going.

Central government advice states that "plan makers will need to consider the size, location and quality of dwellings needed in the future for older people in order to allow them to move. This could free up houses that are under occupied."

And that is a start, but the fact is that none of the recent schemes we have been involved with have had site-specific local plan policies promoting elderly care accommodation in the Local Planning Policy Framework. They often have vague notions of general policy support or, sometimes they declare that older people are best served by being able to reside in their own homes. What we need is an approach akin to affordable housing where local development schemes must contain an element of C2 use. Be it residential/nursing care or extracare. Until then we will muddle on with one eye on the clock and the other on the rapidly burning fuse of the demographic time bomb. ct

New build plans in the pipeline?
Let us know! Email: editor@caringtimes.plus.com