

The last taboo. A guide to dementia, sexuality, intimacy and sexual behaviour in care homes.

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A review for **Dementia UK** by Prof Susan Mary Benbow.

This guide is aimed at care home workers and managers to help people learn more about the subject and to encourage them to think about their own attitudes and beliefs. It is 30 pages long but is very user-friendly and includes case studies, questions, suggestions and ideas, and a short self-assessment quiz (page 43). It also gives some good links to other literature relevant to the topic. I don't see why concerned family members shouldn't read it too.

The report lists top ten key points. They are:

1. some people in care homes will have sexual or sensual needs
2. affection and intimacy contribute to residents' health and well-being
3. some residents living with dementia will be capable of making their own decisions about their needs
4. If a person in care is not capable of making a decision the Home has a duty of care towards them which means that they should be protected from harm
5. Each situation needs to be assessed on its own merits. "There are no hard and fast rules".
6. We need to remember that not everyone with dementia is heterosexual.
7. Inappropriate sexual behaviour in dementia is uncommon.
8. We all need to confront our own attitudes, beliefs and behaviour towards older people and sex in general.
9. We need to think how to improve communication between managers, workers and residents on the topic of sexuality and intimacy.
10. Staff need to look after themselves and remember their own needs as professionals.

I think this report is gold dust. It is readable, practical and sensible. The case studies read like people I have met and worked with in the past. If it is used in Homes it will support thoughtful person-centred care. I would like to encourage care home managers and workers to share it with their colleagues and to use it to encourage reflection and discussion about sexuality and intimacy in dementia.

I'm going to email it out now to people in my address book. How can we all make sure it gets to the people who need it?

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