

## **Uncomfortable bedfellows: Discourses of care and business in the delivery of health care in UK care homes**

Increasing age accompanied by chronic disease, increasingly high levels of cognitive impairment, incontinence and immobility can result in some people experiencing profound disability and dependency. Following ongoing reform and change, the NHS no longer provides care for these people. Instead the majority of this care is now undertaken by a mixed economy of providers but primarily delivered by a privatised care home industry. In spite of this NHS primary care is still responsible for providing health care to care home residents. However, inappropriate hospital admissions indicate that the delivery of health care in homes is not effective. It has been argued that care home residents are medically dispossessed despite their health care needs.

This paper explores the delivery of health care in care homes. Specifically it examines the discourses employed by care home staff and health professionals as they describe their health care practices. This analysis is based on thirty-two interviews with care home staff and health professionals and fieldwork. An ageing population living with complex chronic debilitating disease poses important questions for how society cares for some of its most vulnerable people. The social construction of care is born out of essentialist ideas around compassion, altruism, advocacy and mothering. In contrast the ideology of business confers ideas around targets, profit and turnover. These two ideologies sit uncomfortably with each other as both care home staff and NHS health professionals encounter moral ambiguity as concerns for care and business influence their delivery of health care.