

Safeguarding

CareTech is the proud sponsor of the Community Care Safeguarding Campaign and as a key provider of services across the whole social care spectrum we would like to set out our own position on this vital issue.

Everyone who cares about vulnerable adults or children should believe without reservation that they will do nothing but good and will never deliberately cause harm to anyone that they support.

We want to see the best in care workers and the idea that we should also understand the worst in people is uncomfortable. But that is exactly what we must do if we are to ensure everyone's safety and well-being.

We work hard to ensure that our service users will have a good and fulfilling life. We encourage measured risks whether it is cooking for the first time, entering a new relationship or undertaking an exciting new pastime. We are sometimes astonished by the enthusiasm of our service users to go on holidays that involve scuba diving, gliders, climbing and a whole lot more. Each of these activities is life enhancing but the adventure is managed so that risk is minimised.

However, safeguarding carries the association of deliberate harm or injury caused through negligence. It happens here and everywhere, and eliminating harm is a responsibility for every one of us.

Most people consider safeguarding in the context of residential care and, of course, hospital care. There are comprehensive support systems and protective procedures in place to ensure as far as possible that people are protected while in these care settings. Despite this assumption that people should be safe from harm in care homes and hospitals we are all aware that things can go wrong with disastrous results for the victims.

However, we believe that the risk of harm is even greater in the unregulated home care sector and of course within individual or group supported living situations. This could become much worse with the growth of personalisation and independent living unless regulators adapt their approach to include these arrangements within their model of external scrutiny.

In CareTech we have our own regulatory compliance team comprising social workers and health professionals who make no distinction between supported living, home care and registered care. They inspect services more frequently than the Care Quality Commission and take a very rigorous approach to compliance. Their reports are seen at Board level and any areas for concern are promptly acted on by the managers. The team also investigates the rare occasions where things have gone wrong and report direct to our Safeguarding and Care Governance Committee.

Local Authority Safeguarding panels for the protection vulnerable adults (and of course the separate panels for protecting children) are an invaluable resource for raising awareness of risk and reinforcing the message that it is simply wrong to cause harm. We hold Safeguarding panels in high regard.

However their actions are generally triggered after a harmful event has occurred and we have always felt that this is just too late.

CareTech is a publicly owned company and we are bound by very strict rules for the Governance of our financial affairs and for our behaviour. This is in addition to our legal obligations and Care regulations that are scrutinised by the Care Quality Commission. In practice, as a public company listed at the London Stock Exchange we are the most regulated and scrutinised care company in the UK, with a formal legal requirement for the disclosure of key data about company affairs.

We take these responsibilities and legal duties very seriously and last year we established a Safe Guarding and Care Governance Committee to help us deliver safe care of the highest quality. This is a pioneering initiative led by our three independent Non-Executive Directors who have the power and authority to hold the executive Directors to account. The committee is chaired by Mike Adams OBE, a Non-Executive Director and supported by Stewart Wallace and Graham Lewis who are both social workers and by Dr Junaid Bajwa our independent Clinical Director.

The Committee meets regularly to review all cases where safeguarding is an issue and to learn whatever we can from what happened.

Prevention is better than cure so the Committee introduced a popular Whistle Blowing campaign called “Tell Us” that enables any concerned staff member, relative, care professional or service user to contact the Care Director or CEO personally. “Tell Us” has a confidential phone number available 24 hours each day and a dedicated email address that is constantly monitored.

The Board has also been actively engaging with front line staff through a programme of visits and informal discussions, encouraging and supporting the delivery of safe, first class care in services that we all feel proud to call CareTech.

These initiatives have helped to improve services that were already good. Safeguarding events are rare for us but most staff are now confident that they can share their anxieties with Directors before a problem occurs.

Stewart Wallace