

## 4.2 Relationships, families and intimacies Relationships, sex and intimacy in care settings

What	Good practice tips in assessment and design of support and care that engages with relationships, sex and intimacy in care settings
Purpose	Student know ways to enable privacy to care percipients. Students know the impact of dementia on sexual or sensual needs and how to act on this.
Target group	Teachers and trainers in vocational education and their students
Level	Level 2-3-4 in vocational education.
Execution	Extra support from the teacher might be necessary depending on the ability of the students to work independently
Sources	<a href="#">Looking both ways – 12 case studies</a> <a href="#">The last taboo: A guide to dementia, sexuality, intimacy and sexual behaviour in care homes</a>

### Introduction Working with relationships, sex and intimacy in care settings

Sexuality and intimacy are taboo issues in many areas of care for older people for example:

Naresh is a gay man who visits his partner George in the care home. When he goes to see George, he is always sitting in the living area with other residents. This makes it more awkward for Naresh to have personal contact and a relationship with George. He doesn't feel confident enough to ask to move George to his own room so they can have some privacy. The reason this happens could also be because of ageist assumptions that older people are no longer seen as sexual beings.

### Activity

Students to imagine how they might advocate for Naresh with the care home manager and care home staff to include:

- What changes to the environment in the care home might enable more privacy and sensitivity for Naresh and George to be able to express their relationship.
- How would you respond to another resident or member of staff in the care home that says 'what they do in their own bedroom is their own business but I don't want it flaunted in my face'.

Some residents with dementia will also have sexual or sensual needs. Students to read one of the following resources and to revisit the questions above in light of the guidance given.

- Sexuality and intimacy among care home residents (Download the handout for journal club discussion from the link) <https://www.nursingtimes.net/roles/care-home-nurses/sexuality-and-intimacy-among-care-home-residents/7003005.article>
- Relationships and sexuality in social care <https://www.cqc.org.uk/sites/default/files/20190221-Relationships-and-sexuality-in-social-care-PUBLICATION.pdf>
- The last taboo: A guide to dementia, sexuality, intimacy and sexual behaviour in care homes <https://ilcuk.org.uk/the-last-taboo-a-guide-to-dementia-sexuality-intimacy-and-sexual-behaviour-in-care-homes/>

### Sexual citizenship

The World Health Organisation has identified that "sexual active life expectancy" grows in tandem with overall life spans and have called for us to understand its determinants. These questions have been subject to increasing attention and medical and social interest, slowly contributing to a changing perception of the role of sexual health for active and healthy ageing. According to the WHO sexual health is "a state of physical, emotional, mental and social well-being in relation to sexuality; it is not merely the absence of disease, dysfunction or infirmity. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, as well as the possibility of having pleasurable and safe sexual experiences, free of coercion, discrimination and violence. For sexual health to be attained and maintained, the sexual rights of all persons must be respected, protected and fulfilled."

Research by Simpson et al (2018) suggests that a valid sexual/intimate citizenship could be harder to establish for residents identifying as LGBT+, particularly given that fellow residents will have experienced – in the UK – a

socially and governmentally sanctioned oppression for most of their lives. Simpson et al have examined this issue in care homes and you can read their top tips for working with these issues including a free download of a handout for a journal club discussion here:

<https://www.nursingtimes.net/roles/care-home-nurses/sexuality-and-intimacy-among-care-home-residents/7003005.article>

### **Bisexual lives**

Bisexual relationship histories can be both a source of strength and a source of difficulty in later life and may encounter hostilities and misunderstanding throughout their life course including from lesbian and gay peers. The following report 'Looking both ways' provides 12 case studies based on research that bring some of the issues facing bisexual people in later life to life and can be used as resources for discussion with students on bisexual relationships.

The case studies can be accessed [here](#)

### **Activity**

Ask students to read at least 3 of the case studies (Immogen, Alex and Chryssy); and to write a reflective commentary on what they have learned about the diversity within sexual identities and to make three key points about the relevance of someone's history of relationships and identities to their use of care services.

### **Keep on learning**

- Simpson, P., Wilson, C., Brown, L., Dickinson T., & Horne, M. (2018). 'We've had our sex life way back': Older care home residents, sexuality and intimacy. *Ageing and Society*, 38(7), 1478-1501.  
doi:10.1017/S0144686X17000101
- Use this link to read further on Ageing and Sexual Health  
<http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/Life-stages/sexual-and-reproductive-health/publications/entre-nous/entre-nous/ageing-and-sexual-health.-entre-nous-no.-77,-2013>