

ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON VEGETARIANISM AND VEGANISM

PRESENTED BY



The Macmillan Room, Portcullis House, Tuesday 28 January 2020

Inquiry: Respect for religious and philosophical beliefs while eating in care

Christina Rees MP, Chair of APPG on Vegetarianism and Veganism, opened the meeting and introduced the MPs in attendance, Henry Smith and Alex Sobel.

What are the experiences of individuals and their families who have had difficulties accessing food in line with their religious or philosophical beliefs while in care?

What are the experiences of care staff who are responsible for cooking for or feeding individuals in care, in line with religious or philosophical beliefs?

Jackie Pool, Directory of Memory Care, Sunrise Senior Living

- Potential residents and families need to be consulted on typical dietary consumption and foods outside of the menu plan to enable a full understanding prior to moving in so that sourcing, preparing and supporting the person to eat well can be supported.
- Potential difficulty accessing key ingredients and recipes.
- Lack of information/communication between catering and care and sales team (via the person/family).
- Lack of chef training.
- Restrictions on purchasing from suppliers of key ingredients. Care homes may only order from one wholesaler and if a wholesaler does not have ingredients they will go without purchasing them.

Amanda Woodvine, Chief Executive Officer, Vegetarian for Life

- VfL has received case reports on this from a range of sources, from independent mental capacity advocates, through to care helpline managers, care workers, and directly from those with loved ones living in care establishments.
- The Compassion In Care helpline reports that the issue of food in care homes is a common feature in many cases that it receives, including what it describes as denial of suitable food for religious beliefs. It reports that Jewish

and Muslim dietary requirements are often disregarded. Likewise vegan and vegetarian diets are often ignored.

- A lady called Tuesday contacted VfL directly. She had been a care worker for over a decade. As a vegan herself, she was aware of what vegetarians and vegans do not eat but her experience was that many care homes did not seem to care about individual beliefs, even when they were outlined in a care plan.
- One particularly difficult situation was when Tuesday discovered a resident who was 85 and needed full care because she was non-verbal and couldn't move her limbs without assistance. The resident was given the same three meals every day, including mashed potatoes with minced meat and peas, but often tried to refuse the food.
- Labelled as 'aggressive' or 'bite risk', Tuesday had a look at her care plan and recognized this resident was a vegetarian. The care workers had been mixing all her food together in a bowl and feeding it to her. She couldn't taste different flavours or textures, and most importantly, she wasn't able to refuse the meat. When Tuesday realized this resident was a vegetarian, she brought it to the attention of the care management and chefs. Tuesday was told to feed meat to the resident, anyway, claiming that she needed it for nutrition, and she wouldn't feel full enough without it.
- An independent mental capacity advocate also contacted us directly, and told us Margaret's story. Margaret was an older woman living in a care home. Margaret had dementia. The advocate saw from the local authority care plan that Margaret had chosen to live as a vegetarian for many years. When she visited Margaret's care home, she therefore asked about this. She was told that no, Margaret "chose" to eat meat now; she would "eat whatever is put in front of her". Shocked, the advocate tried to have a conversation about capacity issues with care home staff: did they think Margaret still had capacity to make informed choices? Would she really choose to eat meat when she had chosen earlier in her life not to? The staff shrugged, clearly unwilling to consider the issues. Margaret is happy enough, she was told. I raised the issue with Margaret's social worker but she was not interested either. She thought it was too late, and did it really matter anyway? If Margaret herself was happy enough, then why make a fuss?"
- The issue of people living with dementia in care homes and hospitals, and not having their beliefs respected is a significant one. A quarter of hospital beds are occupied by people living with dementia who are over 65 years old, and the prevalence of dementia in care homes has risen to 70%.
- Jonathan Wittenberg, Senior Rabbi, is unfortunately unable to join us today but has told us: "Food is central to our identity and I would hope that stays with us for however long we live. I know this as a Jew and as a Rabbi and I am aware that is the same for my Muslim colleagues, and Hindu colleagues, and people of different religions. "And then within that I am a passionate vegetarian with vegan leanings, and diabetic. "It's at the core of identity. Now, were it the case I was at some point living with dementia and had to move out of the family and community setting that has supported me and protected me and be dependent on the care of a home, I would deeply want all of those aspects of my identity to be respected. I'm sure nobody would think of giving me loads of sugar, because medically it would be dangerous. "But I feel at least as passionate, or more passionate about being Kosher and about being

vegetarian. Those things are the rhythm and meaning of my life. “It's protected under the Human Rights Act to support people in their diet and their choices. But it's also a part of honouring someone's dignity and personhood. I would hope that personhood stays with us for however long we live.”

Dr. Jeanette Rowley, Chair of the Vegan Society's International Rights Network

- I have been contacted by vegans who have had kitchen staff in palliative care settings showing an attitude of prejudice towards vegan staff, including asking derogatory questions.
- There is a breakdown in communication between the multidisciplinary team when someone who suffered from a stroke was then fed meat. I then had to contact the care team to request that all staff knew the patient was vegan and law required her prior ethical convictions to be respected
- Another nurse was discussing giving meat to vegans in care said ‘she won't know the difference’ as a reason that someone could be fed meat if they're incapacitated. The nurse was eventually dismissed due to a range of additional incompetencies.

What changes could be made on a national, regional, or local level to improve access to varied, nutritious and healthy food in line with the philosophical beliefs of individuals in care?

What actions are care home managers, commissioners, and policy makers taking to ensure individuals are fed a varied, nutritious and healthy diet, in line with their beliefs?

Jackie Pool, Directory of Memory Care, Sunrise Senior Living

- Care homes must approach everyone personally and individualize their care. Really getting to know the individual and their needs and beliefs. It also is important to make vegan meals appealing and look as similar to non-vegan meals to stop residents from picking off other plates or asking for a different option.

Dr. Jeanette Rowley, Chair of the Vegan Society's International Rights Network

- It is important to look at the operational stage. Understanding the ‘how’ new rules or regulations can be implemented.
- The provision of food should be integral to good care practice and a member of the catering team should be included in the multidisciplinary team as a standard practice.
- A patient and the family should have a food feedback system and to ensure training for all staff in inclusion and diversity.

Amanda Woodvine, Chief Executive Officer, Vegetarian for Life

- VfL recently launched a memory care pledge. The pledge consists of five good practice statements that relate to catering inclusively for vegetarians and vegans with loss of capacity.
- These statements centre around:
 1. providing choice at mealtimes.
 2. providing support for a vegetarian or vegan identity. For example, using vegetarian and vegan logos; providing cues regarding what vegan or vegetarian options are on the menu; access to veggie publications.
 3. inclusivity during celebrations. If other residents are having a BBQ, is something similar provided for vegetarians? What about birthday cake for a vegan?
 4. the option to eat at a veggie table. When managing allergies, for example, many people don't think twice about avoiding a resident becoming ill by careful seating. Would seating any veggie residents together help prevent residents with loss of capacity from thinking 'I'll have what the meat eating resident next to me is having...'
 5. last but not least, if an accidental choice is made, and a vegetarian appears to be asking for meat, can that resident simply be given a dish that is similar in appearance, but that instead upholds their beliefs?
- VfL has also been working with the Care Inspectorate in Scotland to develop so-called quality indicators – a 'checklist' for good practice for vegetarians and vegans that can be used on care inspections. We'd hope that these could be rolled out through all care inspectorates nationwide.
- Additional training is needed – more time outlining the importance of religious and philosophical beliefs and the law around them in core training modules for care and catering providers, such as the Care Certificate. Tier 1 of the National Dementia Training Standards Framework is a requirement for all staff working in social care – could fostering respect for beliefs and the law around them be made mandatory?

Any other information regarding religious or philosophical beliefs and how these rights can be sustained and met with dignity in care?

Dr. Jeanette Rowley, Chair of the Vegan Society's International Rights Network

- Staff should be aware that all former ethical convictions of those with reduced capacity should be taken into account.
- Make sure to have a power of attorney and utilizing it to make sure there is a known belief. Do this as soon as possible and update it regularly.

Amanda Woodvine, Chief Executive Officer, Vegetarian for Life

- With respect to being given food or drinks that are not vegetarian or vegan when that individual is stated as vegetarian or vegan in the care plan. In response to a recent Freedom of Information Act request around this, a large majority of local authorities responded saying they hold no information about

care homes and do not handle care home complaints. This is largely because most councils now do not oversee or have any investment in the care homes and most care homes are private with the council paying fees for residents who qualify (a few requests did mention this). They also said if complaints were made it would be expected to be made to the care home manager and handled within the home, not with external bodies.

- A small number of responses say they are unable to complete the request because it would require a manual search of their records or of care home records, which they do not have access to/it would exceed the cost allowed by FOI.
- Every response included that care homes are required to take note of individuals beliefs and likes and dislikes. However, no responses outlined what any consequence would be if care homes either didn't do this or didn't adhere to the preferences.
- One Council responded: "I am not aware that the incident of a vegetarian resident being given meat was indeed a complaint".
- The Care Quality Commission responded saying they have no database for complaints so they would be required to manually search, thus exceeding time and cost limits. The CQC needs to develop a system that allows for more transparency and better tracking of issues and complaints as such.

Audience Q&A

- Discussion began whether this is **an issue in hospitals as well as care homes** after Henry Smith asked whether these experiences are happening in NHS Hospitals. A member of the public discussed how her mother, who ate vegan as much as possible, was taken to an NHS hospital and had no food available for her to eat. Daughter had to go home to make her a meal to bring back. Even agreeing to a vegetarian diet, she was struggling to eat a low fibre and vegetarian meal. She explained that the privatized menu from an outsourced company couldn't have been mixed with the hospital's menu. This meant that if her mother tried to eat something from each menu they would either refuse to serve it or once hospital staff took food away from her. The panel agreed that this is difficult situation and it should not be happening in hospitals and it may be a consideration for the APPG to look at.
- The **role of the media was discussed**. One member of the audience explained how television shows may bring up veganism, but it ends in a joke or trivializes what it is.
- In response to **a concern of there being no vegan retirement homes/care homes**, which is a concern for veg*ns who will not eat from kitchens that prepare meat, Amanda discussed the history of vegetarian and vegan cooperative housing. Unfortunately, many people are not willing to move away from their locality for care, which means there would need to be hundreds of homes across the UK to fill this void. However, the panel agreed that it is something to aspire to and hope that living as a veg*n in care will get better as it becomes a bigger demographic.
- One nurse **questioned what actions can be taken or is there legal precedent for vegans who are not cared for properly when in hospital**. Janette explained that there would first need to be a complaint through the appropriate channel at the hospital. It can be difficult to prove cause and

effect in a lawsuit. The best option would be for an individual to take it through the hospital's formal complaint procedure and go forward from there.

- It was asked what, if any, **medical training care home staff members had** on making sure that veg*ns have the right nutrients. Jackie explained that in care, it is important to monitor any changes. Any changes that are seen in their regular bloodwork or weight are then passed onto a GP.
- One member of the public just wanted **to express gratitude over this inquiry**. Explaining that education and understanding of what veganism is and why people are so passionate about it is so important to furthering the accessibility of vegan food.