

What Does Helping Hand Think About: *Closed Circuit TV Cameras In Residential Aged Care?*

The Issue

In recent years, family with concerns about the treatment of their loved ones in residential care have felt they had no choice but to use Closed Circuit TV Cameras (CCTV), often secretly, to find out what was going on. The appalling treatment they uncovered has resulted in action against some aged staff and, most recently, has led to the Aged Care Royal Commission. None of these incidences occurred at Helping Hand.

During this time, there have been many calls for the use of CCTV in residential care, particularly in individual's rooms, with a trial recently commenced by SA Health.

Helping Hand's Position

We do not support the routine use of CCTV in the private rooms of older people living in residential care.

We support, and currently use, CCTV in public areas of our residential care facilities.

We believe that there may be rare situations where the use of CCTV in a person's private room could be considered. This would need to be done carefully, in consultation with the older person and their family (where appropriate) and taking into account safety, privacy, dignity and legal considerations.

Why we think this

Our promise to older people and their families and friends is that we will provide a safe, secure and caring environment, free from abuse and neglect, and that we will respect their right to privacy and dignity.

Safety

In terms of safety, CCTV is primarily a surveillance response, that is, a way of watching and gathering information. For example, CCTV has been found to be most useful, in public areas at least, in investigating bad behaviour, potentially stopping it once it is witnessed and increasing the perception of safety. For these reasons, we use CCTV in the public areas of our residential care facilities.

In the current discussion, CCTV often is talked about as a way to keep people safe, based on the assumption that people will not behave badly if they know they are being watched. However, the evidence around the value of CCTV as a preventative measure is less conclusive.

We believe that there are more effective ways of ensuring the safety of older people living in residential care, including:

- Investing in staff – recruiting the right people and supporting them to be the best they can be;
- Focusing on team work – to support people to work together and support each other;
- Investing in our leaders – to equip them to support and encourage good staff and teams and to have the tough conversations with underperforming staff;
- Specific training around elder abuse;
- Robust reporting procedures, including protection for whistle blowers and code of conduct;
- Continuous monitoring and review of care practices;
- Use of technology at some sites, such as movement sensors, which provide alerts when unusual motion is recorded;
- Mechanisms for receiving and acting on feedback and complaints; and
- Ensuring our residential care facilities have appropriate staffing at all times to monitor the people in our care, with staff levels regularly reviewed by the site managers as older peoples' needs change.

We have invested in The Helping Hand Way values program and are introducing My Home Life Leadership programs to support our staff in these areas.

A matter of trust

Families and friends have placed their trust in us to ensure the safety of their loved one. A critical preventative measure is our ability to listen and respond to their concerns and the concerns of older people themselves. Failure to do so undermines their trust, as well as potentially resulting in harm. This lack of trust is one of the reasons people have resorted to covert (or secret) CCTV or other recording devices.

Building and maintaining a trusting relationship between older people, families and friends, and our staff is critical to our core mission and is something we will continue to develop and enhance. This includes continually developing our formal and informal feedback mechanisms, such as complaints processes, Turn Up Your Voice surveying, open disclosure, resident and family meetings, and participation in care planning and reviews.

Privacy and dignity

Older people living in residential care have the same right to personal privacy and to be treated with respect as any other citizen. This includes the right to restrict access to their room and to undertake everyday activities such as conversations, bathing and other personal care tasks, getting dressed, and having intimate relationships, without being watched by a third party. We believe the use of CCTV may compromise these rights.

Legal issues

The legal status of CCTV use in private areas is unclear, in terms of privacy legislation or in terms of its use for evidence gathering or other surveillance. Until there is more clarity in this area, it would be unsafe and inappropriate for any person to use CCTV in their private room.

There may be times when we might consider using clearly identifiable CCTV, for example, where we suspect staff of behaviour which is inconsistent with our values or have concerns about the behaviour of other people who visit the site. In these circumstances, we would need to balance the safety, privacy, dignity and legal issues identified and to work with the older person, family and friends (as appropriate) to make decisions around what should be done. We see deploying CCTV in a private room as an absolute last resort strategy in managing the concerns of an individual in our care, or their families and we do not support the covert (or secret) use of CCTV.

