

Sarah I'Anson interview

Everyone working in adult social care has had to adapt and evolve to the challenges presented by the Covid-19 pandemic.

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The vital role of care homes in shielding residents and caring for those in isolation has been thrown into the spotlight as the pandemic

takes hold in the UK, with an increasing need to provide commissioners with a clear picture of care home capacity their operational status.

Nearly all care homes across England are using Capacity Tracker as a way of providing contemporaneous data on care home capacity and status in terms of business readiness and continuity.

"During the Covid-19 pandemic I think we are all on the 'same page' with understanding the need to gather accurate and timely information about cases, deaths, and hospital admissions."

As a Commissioning Manager for Adult Social Care at City of York Council, Sarah I'Anson is well-aware of the need to understand how care homes in the city are managing the added pressures on the care of residents and protecting staff.

Capacity Tracker provides 'real-time' data and insight into how care homes in the city are coping and what capacity they have to receive people discharged from hospital.

The web-based system built and managed by North of England Commissioning Support (NECS) alongside NHS England and the care home industry has been around for some two years. When the Covid-19 crisis spread it was Capacity Tracker that the Government guided care homes to use to highlight capacity and readiness.

As the name suggests, Capacity Tracker tracks the availability of accommodation in care homes and other settings and provides care home managers with a tool to alert health and social care as to the vacancies available in individual homes (in real time). This has a dual benefit in allowing private care home providers to complete occupancy and for social care commissioners and discharge managers it shows them where the capacity in the system is.

With the spread of Coronavirus the scope of the system has expanded to share not only capacity, but also data on staffing, PPE supplies and other areas related to business continuity.

"The support we get from NECS has been brilliant. We've attended numerous webinars and have a weekly call with the Capacity Tracker team which allows us to feedback any comments."

City of York Council, alongside colleagues in Vale of York CCG, was one of the 'early adopters' of Capacity Tracker following its initial roll-out.

Sarah is clear about what the system offers the council. She said: "Capacity Tracker has been a real boon for the council. Not only does it avoid repeated calls to busy care home managers to ask about their capacity status it also provides us with real-time data to place people in local care homes."

Since its launch the council has created a dedicated team support placement in care homes across the city, using Capacity Tracker to support decisions on placements.

Sarah added: "Capacity Tracker has become an incredibly useful tool as part of our system-wide response to Covid-19 providing us with key business continuity status information from providers. It helps us form a 'position statement' as part of our daily situation report ('sit-rep')."

"As part of that process we work with care home providers across York ask them to update the system by a specific time so we have a clear picture of what's happening in each home. If Capacity Tracker didn't exist we would have to make multiple calls or set up a parallel monitoring system."

The information the Adult Commissioning Team gathers from Capacity Tracker is sent to the Command Centre providing a snapshot position of capacity in the 36 care homes in York.

Sarah said: "While we have that system insight, we still make some calls to care home managers to find out how they are doing and strengthen the relationship - but we prefer those calls to be more about welfare support.

"If a care home has reported as 'red' on Capacity Tracker Adults Commissioning Team would call the home and see if they needed any support, for example if they had an increase in Covid-19 cases, workforce issues or availability of personal protection equipment (PPE).

Sarah added: "We want to lift the burden from care home managers, not add to it, so we work with CCG colleagues on joint comms to encourage care homes to populate business continuity data in the tracker to limit calls on hard data to care homes as much as possible. Capacity Tracker helps us to do that."

While the Capacity Tracker online system provides insight and data for analysis it is still important for the Adult Commissioning Team and placement hub to maintain close relationships with care home managers.

Sarah said: "We really value our relationships with local care home managers and provide them with 'named' contacts at the council to provide support. I hope we offer them a 'friendly ear'."

York has a 'mixed' care economy of national companies, small privately-run independents and one local authority-run care home.

Sarah said: "Even when we are working with national care home groups it's the local manager who knows more about the level of PPE supplies, staff sickness, infection levels and who has gone into hospital that day."

Capacity Tracker was designed to be user-friendly and responsive to users' needs. This is supported by Sarah's experiences. "It's incredibly easy to use," she says. "In my job I'm interested in the reporting function and the spreadsheets are easy to use and really helpful."

"My only request would be to have more detailed data collection fields in the tracker which would be useful for local commissioners."

Elizabeth Hancock, Managing Director of Fulford Nursing Home in York added:

"We have been using Capacity Tracker for at least two years. More should embrace it. It helped solve my biggest headache – occupancy. We have to be efficient in use of beds and if I am wasting time ringing around to fill them it eats into time which could be better spent in running the care home.

"Capacity Tracker is a way of saying "I have a vacancy and may be able to help you". For instance, we had a council in London call us looking for a bed in York for a gentleman who wanted to be closer to his family in York and receive end of life care. They would have found us sooner if they had used Capacity Tracker and the gentleman could have spent more time closer to his family. So it's not just care homes trying to fill beds – it's about making a difference to families and people at often the most important time of their lives."