



Care industry crisis

Call for crackdown as unskilled workers put needy at risk

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DISABILITY advocates are calling for a crackdown on the care industry as the state's most vulnerable citizens are put at risk by workers who don't know how to perform basic tasks.

A shortage of skilled carers coupled with an ageing population has seen many people finding employment in care work without the appropriate qualifications, according to state disability advocacy groups.

Among the complaints are: **AGENCIES** knowingly employing underqualified staff to avoid paying them the award rate, required by federal law.

OVERSEAS students being "pushed through" care courses without being able to speak or write English.

TRAINERS not teaching essential hygiene skills to students because they are "embarrassed".

AGENCIES threatening staff with dismissal for refusing to perform tasks they are unqualified for.

To become a qualified carer in South Australia, a person must complete a six-month Certificate 3 course in aged care or disability work at TAFE or other registered training organisation.

While it is state government policy that all Disability SA support workers have a Certificate 3, Disability, Advocacy and Complaints Service SA chief executive David Rigney said one-in-five agencies were ignoring the guideline.

"You have agencies who aren't on the (Disability SA) preferred provider list, these people just put people on the ground who are usually casual or part-timers and are pursuing other careers," he said. "They don't have the standards and the level of care is suspect to say the least.

"The best agencies ... with staff

who are highly trained and work very well with people with disability, the really good ones you could count with one hand."

The *Sunday Mail* understands some agencies who are on the Disability SA preferred provider list still employed staff who did not have Certificate 3.

Former Australian president of Disabled Peoples' International, Andrew Kyprianou, who is also director of an independent social work agency, said he was aware of many agencies employing carers without the correct qualifications.

He said many companies were tempted to use underqualified workers to meet growing demand, as well as to avoid paying them award rates, a requirement introduced by the Federal Government on July 1 last year.

"That's tempted some agencies to employ underqualified staff so they don't have to pay the award rate," he said. "Then there are some people who are so desperate, they grab whoever they can at times because they desperately need staff."

Mr Kyprianou also questioned the adequacy of the basic course in care work, saying many overseas students were being "pushed through" the system without a basic command of English.

"Overseas students are being pushed through Certificate 3 and a lot of them don't speak English," he said.

"The question is, how are they getting through Certificate 3 when they can't write or speak English?"

"A number of times in the past six to eight weeks we've even knocked back applications because people don't even understand our standard interview questions, even though

they have Certificate 3."

One carer trainer, who did not want to be named, said many Certificate 3 students still had no idea what they were doing when they started work.

"(The courses) teach you the knowledge base and they teach you the basics of living, like showering, toileting, cleaning and medications, but the standard is not as strong as it could be," he said.

"Sometimes (teachers) just presume things are easy or understood, like wiping a person's bottom. It's not a very good job to have to do but you have to do it properly and if you don't ... it can lead to infection.

"Another example is not cleaning between the toes - people gloss over this and don't realise it has to be done, but the gunk that builds up can become infectious.

"Some trainers are embarrassed and not thorough, they will just gloss over topics instead of showing students and getting them to do it over and over again so they know how to do it properly, and learn how to do it without being embarrassed," he said. "A lot of the problem stems from them not being taught how to overcome embarrassment."

Disability advocate Monika Baker said problems in the industry were often swept under the carpet because both care recipients and workers were too scared to speak out.

"For example, carers are not trained to put catheters into people, registered nurses do that, but I know carers that have been asked to put in catheters and when they have spoken out about it they have been threatened with dismissal."



BEDBOUND: Stroke victim Craig English with wife Linda ... they are having difficulties finding suitable carers for him

CASE STUDY 1

TO Craig English, a good carer is a rare commodity.

The father of three has needed two carers a day to bathe him and put him in his wheelchair since being left disabled by a stroke in 2005.

But after changing agencies five times in the past five years, he says good help is hard to come by.

Living in Gawler South has also made life difficult for the 51-year-old, who is bedbound until his carers arrive each morning to lift him out.

"We've had so much trouble trying to get good, consistent carers," he said this week. "We only have an hour each morning and people don't want to hop into a car and get paid \$20 an hour to come out for a one-hour job in Gawler."

Mr English has had about 20 carers and said he only changed agencies for good reasons. "I can count the good (carers) on one hand - they've been top-notch," he said.

He said some carers would not know how to position his sling lifter, which he uses to get out of bed. Others came late, didn't show up or left early, and some carers did not speak English.

Mr English thinks the basic Certificate 3 qualification is too easy to obtain. "As long as they've got their Certificate 3 they've got a job but they don't have the experience on site," he said.

CASE STUDY 2

Community service worker, 52, uses carers for her father, 93

One day the carer left the telephone unplugged. Dad relies on it for emergencies and he wouldn't have looked at that for days. They also left a mop and bucket on the floor. If it's in the way he's going to slip over. They're the smallest little things but if carers aren't thinking OH&S the whole time, something's going to happen.

CASE STUDY 3

Retired nurse, 71, uses carers for her husband, 71

He has severe cardiac problems, and had a quadruple bypass in 2006. Because of his heart condition he has difficulty breathing, and he's not allowed to lift his arms above his head. The carers lifted his arms up to dress him. You're meant to take one arm out then the other and then the head.

CASE STUDY 4

Man, 64, used carers for his father (now deceased at age 88)

My father had a catheter and when he prepared for bed the carer put the catheter in and didn't tie the urinal bag to the bed properly. He turned in the bed at night and the bag fell on to the floor and pulled the catheter off his penis - you imagine the pain. He lived for three years, the rest of his life, with a split penis. Fitting the catheter is done by a doctor or nurse but changing the catheter bag is done by the carer.

CASE STUDY 5

Woman, 53, uses carers for her father, 91

Dad needs to be washed in a bedbath, and they didn't know how to use lifting apparatus. Some carers didn't know how to turn him over properly - he can get aggressive and they just get scared. They don't know how to handle it.