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# How Resident Committees Function in Aged Care

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## BACKGROUND

- Australian aged care facilities are legally required to provide residents with opportunities for decision-making and control.
- Resident committees are a common way to provide this opportunity to residents.
- There has been no other Australian research published on resident committees and little world-wide.

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## RESEARCH AIMS

- How do resident committees function?
- What do residents want in their meetings?
- Work with Aged Rights Advocacy Service to write Resident Group Survey and Recommendations (*funded by the Department of Health and Ageing*)
- Give residents an effective voice.

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## METHOD

- Facilities
  - 1999-2002 20 SA facilities
  - 2008 -15 facilities
- Method
  - Observe 1-2 meetings at each facility (52 meetings)
  - Resident questionnaires (175)
  - Interview relevant staff (30)
  - Minutes of the meetings
  - Small group forums (15)

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## OUTCOMES OF RESEARCH

- Resident Group Survey
  - 110 questions
  - Yes/No
- Guidelines for effective resident committees based on research
- Enable facilities to assess and improve their resident committees based on what their residents want and on what works well.

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## HOW A MEETING IS SET UP

- Most commonly activity (41%) and dining rooms (33%)
- Half were private and quiet
- Some problems with uncomfortable chairs
- Residents will leave if there are not enough chairs
- Hearing problems (in 75% of meetings)
- More participation if in a circle with a chairperson slightly out the front

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### HOW A MEETING IS SET UP RECOMMENDATIONS

- Hold meeting in a room that is private, doors can be closed, people can speak freely
- A variety of types of chairs and adequate number of chairs. Room for wheelchairs
- Make sure room is welcoming and comfortable temperature, near toilets, clock in the room
- No distractions (mobile, PA, adjoining kitchen)
- Microphone (1 for chair plus 1 roving one).
- Talk loud and clear!!
- A circle is best

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### AGENDA AND MINUTES

- Majority had some form of agenda
  - 30% had an agenda provided to residents.
- Minutes
  - All had some form of minutes
  - 60% provided to residents who attended meetings
  - Some just on noticeboard

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### AGENDA AND MINUTES RECOMMENDATIONS

- Agenda on noticeboard worked well
- On noticeboard- put low enough for people in wheelchairs
- Give a copy between meetings and day of meeting
- Make writing at least this big but preferably this big
  - Can you read this?
- Make simple and relevant
- Include dates and stick to them!
- Read them out as you go along. Number items and refer to number so that people don't get lost

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### WHAT IS TALKED ABOUT?

- Most common topics (residents):
  - Food (41%)
  - Maintenance (28%)
- Found:
  - Complaints main function of 86% of meetings
  - Information (100%)
  - Very few opportunities for decision-making (20%)
- Only 40% of topics raised by residents

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### HOW CAN PARTICIPATION BE ENCOURAGED? RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ask each resident individually
- Offer a topic for discussion at the next meeting
- Give people plenty of time to talk
- Take note after meetings at tea and coffee- topics are often raised here
- Have faith in their abilities
  - "It was only 5 years ago I was chairing a committee as a volunteer. My disease has got hold of me physically but not my marbles" Resident
  - "They've got no idea" staff

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### WHO IS THE CHAIRPERSON/ FACILITATOR?

- Manager (40%)
- Lifestyle Coordinator / Diversional therapist (30%)
- Volunteer (20%)
- Resident (5%)
  - "They aren't capable of it. The others would feel like they are being favoured" Manager
- Only one person had training



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**WHAT SHOULD THE CHAIRPERSON DO? RECOMMENDATIONS**



- Watch your responses:
  - "Okay I'll put that on the agenda. I will call them tonight"
  - "I had the fish today and it was fine"
- Summarise each discussion to check content
- Don't let your opinion dominate. Facilitate discussion only
- Value each comment

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**WHAT ARE THE OUTCOMES OF ISSUES RAISED?**

- 71% of topics raised were minuted
- 43% of issues raised at meeting 1 were not mentioned at meeting 2
- 18% of issues raised at meeting 1 resulted in some kind of outcome at meeting 2
- Large resident frustration of lack of outcomes
  - "I don't have to talk. It makes no difference anyway"
  - She (manager) doesn't listen to anything you say. She just says ok and forgets"



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**HOW TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES OF ISSUES RAISED RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Record and follow up on all comments.
- What is important to a manager is very different to a resident
- Give clear timelines for following up
- Have a formal, written record of the process of follow-up of issues

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**MOST IMPORTANTLY: CONTINUALLY ASSESS AND IMPROVE**

- Use the Resident Group Survey and Guidelines:
  - Ask residents what they want
  - Ask them again and again!
  - Give residents as many opportunities as possible to participate
  - Start small
  - Make a commitment to follow through with what residents want.
- Please contact Leah Wilson or Marilyn Crabtree (Aged Rights Advocacy Service) to register your interest in a copy of the Resident Group Survey and accompanying Guidelines for Resident Groups.

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