The care system is a vital part of the network designed to protect those most vulnerable in our society, but in many areas it is simply not doing its job. Sadly, in some cases there is a failure to protect older, vulnerable people, who are being subjected to neglect and abuse in care.

At Hudgell Solicitors, we have seen a worrying increase in such cases within care home facilities and we believe now is the time to act. Surveillance may be controversial, but the role of CCTV in care homes must now be fully considered by the government.

As part of our Love Our Vulnerable and Elderly campaign, we are backing an e-petition calling for CCTV to be made compulsory in all care homes. It is aiming to secure 10,000 signatures to force a government response; 100,000 signatures could see it make the agenda in Parliament.

The petition was started by Lisa Smith, who decided to take her father Joshua, an 86-year-old army veteran with Alzheimer’s disease, out of care after four years of what she called “a living nightmare”. It also comes as we, as specialists in handling claims of abuse against older people and those who are vulnerable, have been contacted by an increasing number of families who have turned to secret filming, such were their concerns about poor care.

Critics will say that around-the-clock CCTV coverage infringes on a care home resident’s privacy, but research we have conducted has found overwhelming support for cameras from families.

Our campaign is focused on providing love, protection, respect and dignity, and of course we realise that there are many who consider CCTV an intrusion too far. However, surely the least we can do is install CCTV coverage in all communal areas, and have it as an option for residents and families in their own private rooms. As long as there is an option to opt out of surveillance in private areas, then surely there is no reason why it could not be used effectively, and with the approval of all.
Finding the balance between safety and privacy is difficult, but we believe CCTV would not only help prevent abuse from taking place, but could even help care facilities better observe at-risk residents, and offer them protection against malicious allegations. By campaigning for the implementation of surveillance in care homes, we may finally start to tackle this difficult and long-standing problem.

Abuse and neglect is a problem that persists because of the many “unknowns” families are faced with in the care system. Once they leave a facility, it is difficult to know what is truly going on behind closed doors – and while Care Quality Commission inspections help ensure certain standards, the inspection process does have flaws.

Interestingly, an independent national survey, commissioned by our firm and carried out before we launched our campaign, revealed an increasing openness to CCTV footage being used in care homes, as relatives believed it would help protect their loved ones from abuse and neglect. It found that:

- 83% of those surveyed would agree to their relative being filmed 24 hours a day – or would go as far as filming secretly if they felt a loved one was not being cared for;
- 40% would not trust a care home or residential home to provide a safe environment for their loved one.

These figures suggest the time has come to make a change. The aim of our campaign is far from a potential invasion of privacy, or an infringement of human rights – it is to ensure older people and the vulnerable are loved, respected, protected and cared for with dignity at all times.

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