

In the News:

Hi, I am Keith Albans, Acting Chair of Christians on Ageing. Here is my look back at some of stories which have made the news during the month of March, and which seem relevant to the concerns of our members. Wherever possible I have included links to the original stories which will hopefully give you more information. As always, the comments on the stories are my own and will not necessarily reflect the views of CoA or its members.

1. Dementia

The Alzheimer's Society has attracted considerable controversy because of its new advertising campaign launched in late March. As a charity it clearly needs to raise funds, but it does so alongside the desire to educate and inform, and the need to operate within its values.

<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/about-us/dementia-news-and-media/long-goodbye>

I was surprised when I first saw the video on TV – not because it is hard-hitting, but because I thought that the language of ‘multiple deaths’ had been consigned to history! Indeed, the advert would seem to be at odds with the Society’s own media guidelines drawn up in 2018.

<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-09/Dementia%20Friendly%20Media%20and%20Broadcast%20Guide.pdf>

For many, the dementia journey is a long one and to condense all the stages of that journey into one, as the advert seems to do, feels misguided – as this letter to the Guardian written by someone living with the disease suggests.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/mar/28/dementia-is-not-a-living-death-im-very-much-alive>

On Easter Sunday, Sonia Sodha’s article explored the advert in a clear and helpful way – writing of the way in which it made her feel uncomfortable and adding that she has changed her mind about it many times! Her conclusion is interesting: *“For me, the ad is too blunt and too bleak to achieve its objective of increasing public awareness: people need to be told the truth but also to be offered a little hope to avoid increasing a sense of fatalism which research suggests switches people off. But what I do admire is its willingness not to pretend that “living well”, while the right aspiration, is always a realistic one. And the fact that this advert barely made a splash in the media – imagine how much coverage a controversial cancer ad would have generated – itself reveals that we are not having the right conversation about dementia. In fact, we are barely talking about it all.”*

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/mar/31/alzheimers-society-advert-truth-about-dementia>

At the point of writing the Alzheimer’s Society are rejecting the criticism and maintain that the advert’s message needs to be heard if things are to change.

<https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/news/2024-03-24/ceo-responds-criticism>

2. Assisted Dying

To say that the past month has seen a lot of coverage of this topic might be an understatement, concluding as it did with the tabling of legislation in the Scottish parliament which, if passed, would allow for assisted dying for terminally ill adults.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/mar/28/bill-scotland-could-make-assisted-dying-legal>

This follows on from announcements by both the Jersey legislature and the leader of the Labour Party, Sir Keir Starmer, promising action in the same direction.

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/mar/22/jersey-debate-assisted-dying-terminally-ill-death-tourism>

<http://digitaleditions.telegraph.co.uk/data/1637/reader/reader.html?social#!preferred/0/package/1637/pub/1637/page/2/article/NaN>

The question of how the UK government might respond if legislation is passed by devolved governments was addressed in a report from the House of Commons Health & Social Care Committee, which was welcomed by amongst others, the Bishop of London.

https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2024/8-march/news/uk/bishop-of-london-welcomes-mps-report-on-end-of-life-care?utm_campaign=Church%20Times%20RSS%20Daily%20bulletin%202.0%20%28ads%20in%20header%20and%20footer%29&utm_source=emailCampaign&utm_content=&utm_medium=email

Many individuals have entered the public debate, with Esther Rantzen and Lord Sumption both welcoming the move made in Scotland, albeit with understandable caveats around issues of coercion.

<http://digitaleditions.telegraph.co.uk/data/1654/reader/reader.html?social#!preferred/0/package/1654/pub/1654/page/41/article/NaN>

<http://digitaleditions.telegraph.co.uk/data/1655/reader/reader.html?social#!preferred/0/package/1655/pub/1655/page/14/article/NaN>

And it is precisely the fears of coercion which have led many other to speak out against proposed changes, suggesting that those with disabling illnesses – and even those who are old – might come under pressure to act against their will.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/feb/29/ministers-assisted-dying-disabled-people-euthanasia>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/mar/08/assisted-dying-could-lead-to-many-tragedies-if-not-handled-with-care>

Meanwhile, it is reported that the number of Britons joining Dignitas has risen by almost a quarter in the past year, while most Britons who have chosen to end their lives there did not have a terminal illness.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/mar/28/dignitas-uk-membership-assisted-dying-scottish-parliament-bill>

<http://digitaleditions.telegraph.co.uk/data/1653/reader/reader.html?social#!preferred/0/package/1653/pub/1653/page/29/article/NaN>

3. Adult Social Care

Another hardy perennial to feature in the month's news review is the area of Adult Social Care, with some MP's arguing that government action or inaction has brought the while sector to its knees and calling again for cross-party agreement to be found on a way forward.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2024/mar/20/government-has-brought-adult-social-care-in-england-to-its-knees-mps-say>

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/mar/16/ed-davey-we-need-a-cross-party-agreement-on-social-care>

Kate Garraway's decision to invite people into her recent experiences of the system, following the illness and death of her husband Derek Draper, has helped focus attention on the amazing role played by unpaid family carers without whom the system would have collapsed years ago. This article reminds us that the 2021 census suggested that 5 million people are providing unpaid care to a loved one, although many believe the true figure is far higher.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/mar/27/the-guardian-view-on-unpaid-care-time-to-heed-kate-and-dereks-story>

Another frequent story which brings adult social care into the media spotlight is the issue of migration, as staff shortages are exacerbated by restrictions on workers coming from abroad. That tension is unlikely to have been helped by this report about the Home Office issuing visas for a Care Home which doesn't exist!

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2024/mar/26/home-office-granted-275-visas-to-nonexistent-care-home-report-finds>

4. Pensions

MATT



'Pensioners are the big losers in the Budget. We decided they were the least likely to hold violent demonstrations'

Following the Budget, and the decision not to change the threshold at which income tax is paid, there have been a few stories focussing on the impact on pensioners – with this Matt cartoon from the Daily Telegraph offering a particular angle! Changes in N.I. rates do not benefit most pensioners and estimates suggest those who pay income tax will lose out by £1,000 each.

<https://www.aol.co.uk/news/pensioners-pay-income-tax-lose-121045011.html>

Meanwhile, all parties are under pressure to retain a commitment to the triple state pension lock, which so far both the Tories and Labour have agreed to do. With the rate of inflation falling the promise is likely to be easier to keep in coming years than it has been for the past two years.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/mar/27/poor-money-rich-state-pension-triple-lock-tories-labour>

The cost-of-living crisis may be abating gradually, but one area in which its effects are likely to be felt for years is people's inability to make financial preparations for retirement. The chief of the asset management company BlackRock has warned of a coming crisis.

<https://www.theguardian.com/money/2024/mar/26/little-planning-for-looming-retirement-crisis-blackrock-chief-warns>

5. And finally...

A couple of stories focus attention on inter-generational relationships, with Adrian Chiles reflecting on the death of a parent, and another pointing out some of the downsides of relying on the bank of Mum and Dad.

https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/mar/20/ive-spent-a-lifetime-dreading-the-loss-of-a-parent-and-now-its-finally-happened?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

<https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2024/mar/16/im-embarrassed-to-rely-on-my-parents-the-downside-of-handouts-from-the-bank-of-mum-and-dad>

A newspaper headline rarely tells the whole story, but they are designed to grab your attention. So whoever came up with “Council tells 101-year-old to fix potholes herself” certainly achieved that – although the story doesn’t quite bear it out!

<http://digitaleditions.telegraph.co.uk/data/1636/reader/reader.html?social#!preferred/0/package/1636/pub/1636/page/34/article/NaN>

I had a similar reaction to the headline, “Sign of the times in Japan as nappy company switches production to adult nappies” although this one does seem to better reflect the story. As can be seen from the article, the ageing population of Japan is having a huge effect on the country in all sorts of ways with the population likely to fall by 30% over the next 45 years.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2024/mar/27/oji-holdings-japan-switch-adult-nappies-ageing-society>