**In the News:**

Hi, I am Keith Albans, Chair of Christians on Ageing. Here is my look back at some of stories which have made the news during the month of June 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. **General Election**

It will soon be over! The campaign, launched back on a wet day in May, reaches its conclusion on July 4th, and in the aftermath attention will turn from what everyone claims they will do if elected, to what the winning party actually proposes and does!

A few items from the campaign, relating to the CoA constituency, are worth noting. On the question of assisted dying, the Labour leader had already committed to setting aside time for a Commons vote on the matter, although it is not in the party’s manifesto. The Prime Minister, whose party manifesto does include that commitment, expressed his personal opinion when asked by saying, *“I’m not against it in principle. It’s just a question of having the safeguards in place and that’s where people have had questions in the past.”*

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jun/16/rishi-sunak-not-opposed-assisted-dying>

While the issue of adult social care has been in and around the campaign, the almost complete absence of new ideas or commitments has been apparent from all parties, although the media have kept pushing.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/jun/02/the-observer-view-on-the-social-care-crisis-whoever-wins-the-election-it-needs-addressing-urgently>

The Guardian were particularly open in welcoming the Lib Dem policy to fund free social care at home, while the same paper carried letters underlining the need for positive action in this area.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/jun/04/the-guardian-view-on-social-care-the-lib-dems-have-a-plan-it-should-be-welcomed>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jun/06/free-social-care-for-all-should-be-a-labour-policy>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jun/23/labour-needs-to-think-again-on-care-home-beds>

Meanwhile, Labour has committed to investigate both the carer’s allowance ‘scandal’ and the issues facing migrant care workers, and have pledged to allow NHS England to buy more social care beds.

<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/article/2024/jun/07/labour-vows-to-investigate-carers-allowance-scandal>

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/article/2024/jun/04/labour-pledges-to-investigate-treatment-of-migrant-workers-in-care-sector>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jun/18/labour-says-it-would-let-nhs-in-england-buy-more-social-care-beds>

Throughout the election campaign opponents have examined each other’s spending plans and claimed that they would require massive rises in taxation, each in turn denying the claims about their own plans! At the beginning of the month a G20 meeting of finance ministers outlined possible plans for taxing the world’s 3,000 plus billionaires, claiming such a global tax could raise around $250bn per year. This editorial welcomes the suggestion, while acknowledging how difficult it would be to bring in – whoever forms the next government.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/jun/02/the-guardian-view-on-taxing-billionaires-we-need-to-talk-about-the-super-rich>

1. **Carer’s Allowance / Social Care**

Away from the General Election campaign, more stories highlighting the current state of play have come to light, underlining the vulnerability of the system itself and those employed within it. At the beginning of the month the position of care workers in India, who paid agents to bring them to the UK for supposed jobs, only to discover that the jobs did not exist, made the news. The role of care agencies and the visa system are both explored in this series of articles.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jun/02/he-didnt-have-a-contract-for-me-the-indian-careworkers-who-paid-agents-to-work-in-britain>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jun/02/uk-care-agencies-accused-of-exploiting-foreign-workers-caught-in-debt-traps>

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jun/02/what-are-the-problems-with-the-uk-visa-system-for-care-work>

The issue of pay within the social care sector, specifically in England has been highlighted by research conducted for the Living Wage Foundation. It suggests that around 43% of workers in social care (some 400,000 individuals) are paid less than a real living wage.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jun/09/nearly-half-of-england-care-workers-get-less-than-real-living-wage-study>

The effect of low pay on staff vacancies and recruitment is well known, as is its effect on staff morale. In this piece Gaby Hinsliff suggests that the current state of play is making growing old a “fearful lottery” for many and a cause of concern to families and friends. She also refers back to several policy suggestions which were made in previous election campaigns yet rejected either by voters or by politicians.

<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/jun/11/social-care-dementia-tax-carers>

1. **Assisted Dying**

The broadcaster and writer, Esther Rantzen, is undoubtedly one reason why this topic continues to be front and centre of public debate. Her terminal cancer diagnosis lies behind her campaign, although both she and her late husband have long been involved in the subject. In this article her focus is on the ability or otherwise to choose the preferred place of death, arguing that the current law, which has led her to seek the help of *dignitas,* will prevent her dying where she would prefer

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/article/2024/jun/15/esther-rantzen-right-to-choose-a-good-death>

From the opposite side of the debate comes news that the Irish Catholic Bishops have published an open letter outlining their opposition to any change in the current law – something which was recommended by an Irish parliamentary committee in Marh this year. In their letter they say that the deliberate taking of human life, especially by those whose vocation is to care for it, *“undermines a fundamental principle of civilised society, namely that no person can lawfully take the life of another.”* They are concerned the proposal will offer no real protection and fear it will just be a matter of time before the most vulnerable are affected. They say that the process of dying can be a time where *“old hurts are healed and people find inner peace,”* and this is best supported by palliative and pastoral care.

1. **Dementia**

The current edition of the Journal of Dementia Care (May/June 2024) is dominated by reaction to the Alzheimer’s Society’s controversial TV advertising campaign, *The Long Goodbye*. The campaign has currently been withdrawn, owing to the number of complaints made to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), but the JDC includes both their Board’s response as well as a selection of the many responses that they had received.

In the Board’s response, the main challenge is the wholly negative narrative about the dementia journey. They write, “*The new campaign resurrects a negative construction of dementia, disregarding hope, meaning and purpose. This is at odds with Dementia Community’s values of trust, inclusive community, inspiration and learning. We believe it will always be unacceptable to diminish the unique qualities and strengths of people living with dementia.”* The JDC reports that a letter has been sent to the Alzheimer’s Society’s CEO but at the time of publication, no response has been received.

<https://journalofdementiacare.co.uk/statement-by-the-board-of-dementia-community>

1. **In other news…**

To end with, a couple of stories with a sporting twist. First comes news that weightlifting at retirement age can keep your legs strong years later. According to a study led by the University of Copenhagen, lifting heavy weights three times a week around the age of retirement could dramatically preserve your leg strength long into the later stages of life. Previous smaller studies have suggested that resistance training, which can involve weights, body weight or resistance bands, might be beneficial but this study has found that 12 months of heavy resistance training around retirement age preserves vital leg strength years later.

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/article/2024/jun/18/weightlifting-at-retirement-age-keeps-legs-strong-years-later-study-finds>

Secondly, come news that the boxer, Anthony Joshua wants to open care home for retired boxers. During his Desert Island Discs’ programme on BBC Radio 4 the boxer expressed concern at the poor health of many ex-boxers and the fact that they often suffer alone. Joshua said that he had discussed issues faced by ex-fighters with his former boxing coach, John Oliver. *“They suffer by themselves, so we’ve been speaking about opening up a care home,”* Joshua said. *“That would be part of my boxing legacy – that I gave something back to the sport that made me.”*

<https://www.theguardian.com/sport/article/2024/jun/23/anthony-joshua-world-heavyweight-champion-care-home-retired-boxers-desert-island-discs>