



## The unseen help departs

You might not think that a warden of a residential home has much connection with your life. And if you're picking this up at a train station, then it's unlikely you're a resident of anywhere like sheltered housing.

But while *you* might not be, your father or grand mother might be. And in a generation or two's time, actually, this is going to be your life.

Now, there's a whole spectrum of sheltered housing, but there are quite a few blocks of retirement flats where you only get to live if you're 60plus. And in each one there has been a warden or house manager. His or her job is partly to keep the place going, but also to keep an eye on the residents. A good warden is a precious gift: they go round the flats, and check that Mr Gilchrist has taken his morning medicine, that Mrs Davies has recovered from that fall and is doing her exercises, and all this sort of thing.

In a lot of places, though, these positions are being cut. They are being replaced by a phone line, and a once a week visit for half an hour:

On the surface, it's an easy economy: quite a lot of the time, the warden didn't look like they were doing much anyway. But let's play it out: Mr Gilchrist forgets to take his morning medicine. That doesn't matter much on Monday, but a fortnight later, he's really feeling it: his stomach condition has got out of control and he needs to go to A&E. He goes in, possi-

bly taken by ambulance, and gets put back together, but then he can't leave till there's an effective care package. And that needs to be gone through and underwritten, so he's now a 'bed blocker'. Except it's not his fault, really; all that happened is that he's a bit forgetful and he forgot to take his medicine.

Meanwhile, Mrs Davies hasn't done her exercises: she just couldn't get herself motivated, so her muscle capacity gets worse. She has another fall. She's in hospital too, and the more she lies down, the more her muscles waste till she can hardly walk at all. She needs a new home altogether.

Wardens can play a small but crucial role in the lives of elderly residents. You can cut them and on Day One no one will notice, and you've saved yourself a salary. However, put it in the context of even just a few months and that cut in salary has cost two people their independence as well as the nation hundreds of thousands of pounds in NHS care.

Part of the crisis in NHS funding is the cutting of posts like these, which were quietly soaking up minor incidents *before* they became major ones.

There's a vicar in Kingston who's taking on a block of flats for elderly residents as a church project, to help care for them better. I admire this, but I'm also aware of my limitations: what do I know about residential flats? Overall, we just shouldn't make the cuts in the first place.

*November 2017 Thought for the Train is a short column written by the Reverend Robert Stanier, the vicar of St Andrew and St Mark, Surbiton, for people to read on the train, or elsewhere. You can also read "Thought for the Train" at [www.surbitonchurch.org.uk](http://www.surbitonchurch.org.uk).*