

Film 5: Making Decisions Together

Narrator: Working with older people and enabling them to live life to the fullest can be rewarding but comes with its challenges. Working within the constraints of time and in a person-centred way is just one of them. In the following scenes we return to Patrick and Gillian who have not been coping as well as they would have liked following Gillian's discharge from hospital. Taking Paul's advice they've contacted social services to request a formal assessment. Chloe, a social worker meets them to carry out this assessment.

Acted scenario

Chloe: Hello, you must be Mrs Harper?

Gillian: Oh Gillian please.

Chloe: Gillian, nice to meet you.

Patrick: Have a seat.

Chloe: Oh thanks. How are you feeling Gillian?

Gillian: Oh not too bad thanks.

Chloe: Good. So, are you both clear on why I've come to see you today?

Patrick: More-or-less.

Chloe: Basically I'm here to see how you are both managing really. To see how you are doing Gillian since leaving the hospital and to try and identify any areas you may need help with, any problems you are having.

Patrick: Problems living here you mean?

Chloe: Yes, and any physical care issues you might be having. I understand you are Gillian's sole carer at the moment Patrick?

Patrick: Well I'm her husband.

Gillian: We muddle along but some things are a bit of a struggle.

Chloe: Things can be a little harder after an accident. So what I would like to do is

get a, a general idea of your daily living activities, health that kind of thing.

Patrick: That's a lot of paper.

Chloe: Yes, it is a bit of a lengthy form. It's really just to clarify any areas you need help with.

*Commentary
Marian Barnes*

Workers who are working in statutory agencies usually have a standard format that they have to complete when they are doing assessments. And that can cause problems if what the worker does is simply say "I've got a series of questions that I've got to go through, I am going to start at the beginning and work my way through to the end". Workers need to be very familiar with the questions that they need to get answers to so that they are not constantly looking at the form and they can't look at the person that they are talking to. One of the things that people talked to us about in the research interviews was about the way in which GPs can spend all the time looking at a computer screen rather than looking at them and that was something they really disliked.

Chloe: This is a lovely house. Have you lived here long?

Gillian: Oh it's been twenty years Pat?

Patrick: Twenty seven.

Gillian: Oh, goodness.

Chloe: That's a long time. Is it a nice area?

Gillian: Oh yes.

Patrick: It used to be.

Gillian: It still is. We are just a bit isolated now aren't we?

Patrick: People move away, pass away.

Chloe: Do you have any friend or family in the area at all?

Patrick: Not now, no.

- Gillian: We're stuck with each other.
- Chloe: Is there nobody at all that you call on around here?
- Gillian: It's never been a problem before now but I think the fall gave me a bit of a fright.
- Chloe: So tell me about that, tell me how that happened.
- Gillian: We had a mat as you come into the kitchen. It's gone now, it wasn't in a good state, it was scuffed up at the edges and I just caught it, it was, it was stupid of me.
- Patrick: It was my fault.
- Gillian: I'm sure it would never have happened but I have been having problems for a while, osteoarthritis.
- Chloe: Oh, I see. So tell me about that. Are you able to take anything for it?
- Gillian: Painkillers. Well they help a little but it's the knees. They, they don't move so well as they used to.
- Patrick: I've been around the house to check for any things that could cause problems like that mat.
- Chloe: That's good Patrick, I was going to ask.
- Gillian: We worry, don't we, about how we are both going to manage you know. In the end.
- Patrick: And this last winter was a bit of an eye-opener.
- Chloe: Oh, how so?
- Patrick: Well we were stuck in the house for three days because of the weather. I tried clearing the path a couple of times but it just froze over again the next minute.
- Chloe: And was there no one you could call at all?

- Patrick: Well our nearest friend if you like is a twenty minutes' drive away.
- Gillian: Doris.
- Patrick: Doris, yes, she's getting on herself. I couldn't call her and expect her to risk the journey.
- Chloe: You must have felt very cut off.
- Patrick: That's when we decided we needed to look to residential care. We tried a couple of places.
- Gillian: They weren't very nice.
- Patrick: The first one was alright, but the second one...
- Gillian: It wasn't pleasant.
- Patrick: It was more like a, oh, not for us.
- Chloe: In what way Patrick?
- Patrick: Well it had a nursing wing but some of the people were very oh I don't know.
- Gillian: They needed a lot of care.
- Patrick: You talked to someone one day, the next day they didn't remember you.
- Chloe: Well I would imagine that could be quite unsettling.
- Patrick: I think we'd like to stay in our own home for now. Possibly with some help?
- Chloe: OK So what I would like to do today is to establish what level of care you might need here at home.
- Gillian: Patrick worries about leaving me on my own. I am not so steady after the fall you see.
- Chloe: So there's practical issues for you Patrick like going to the shops that sort of thing.

Patrick: Yes the shops, the doctors, that kind of thing.

Chloe: OK. And how are you managing about the house?

Gillian: Well that's fine. Patrick cooks now, he was always a better cook.

Chloe: That's good. And what about any practicalities like bathing?

Patrick: Well that's getting a bit harder.

Gillian: We've got a seat in the shower and we manage but I'm nervous about slipping and I don't want Patrick to hurt himself either.

Patrick: I'm alright.

Gillian: But if I fall and take you with me?

*Commentary
Lizzie Ward:*

An individual's well-being is often impacted by the well-being of those around them, their loved ones. We often found in the examples in the research, particularly in couples where one partner was caring for the other one, that there was a need to learn how to support their partner in changed circumstances. But actually giving care to their spouse or their partner could generate a sense of well-being for themselves. But it also creates difficulties and that's something to be aware of when you are working with people. Particularly when you are working with a couple, that one person's well-being is connected to the others and it isn't just about an individual in isolation.

Chloe: Do either of you have any other concerns about having a carer come in and help?

Patrick: I don't as long as Gill is comfortable with them.

Gillian: Yes.

Chloe: OK. And Patrick, what about your general health? How is that?

Patrick: Well I'm alright. My eyesight isn't what it used to be but otherwise I am OK.

Chloe: Good. And are you taking any medications at all?

Patrick: Just for blood pressure.

Chloe: Great. And last time you had a check-up was everything alright there?

Patrick: Lost a bit of weight, nothing drastic. Otherwise good.

Gillian: He sleeps like the dead but he is up with the lark.

Chloe: What about any exercise?

Patrick: Oh just to the shops and back really. I don't like leaving Gill on her own too long.

Gillian: You can't always be here, it's not right. He used to play golf.

Patrick: Oh a long time ago.

Gillian: No but you still like to go. There's a group of them play bridge up at the golf club and they chat about men's stuff you know.

Chloe: Yes.

Gillian: I'd like him to go. It's important to me. It's to enjoy life a bit. How could we do that?

Chloe: Well we could look into someone coming to be with Gillian for a few hours during the day while you go to the golf club Patrick.

Gillian: There you go, perfect.

Patrick: Maybe.

Chloe: Well I'll make some enquiries. So, why don't you take me through a bit of your daily routine.

Patrick: How do you mean?

Chloe: You know, take me through a typical day. What do you usually do?

Gillian: Well, Pat's always up an hour before me.

Chloe: OK.

Gillian: I have a cuppa in bed.

Chloe: That's a good start.

Patrick: I get Gill up about half past nine, washed and dressed.

Gillian: We've an en-suite.

Patrick: And we have breakfast down here.

Chloe: And how are you managing with the stairs coming down.

Gillian: Oh that's fine. We have got a spare bedroom down here if it's a problem.

*Commentary
Marian Barnes:*

A worker who is sensitised can actually recognise how a response to a particular suggestion is indicating that this is not a preferred option. Now there is something in the way that Patrick responds that indicates that he is not quite happy. And these are things that may not relate to questions, specific questions on the assessment form but which give you important clues that you might need to follow up.

Chloe: Now if we could just go back to something that we were talking about earlier, you mentioned about the downstairs bedroom, does that have an en-suite like the master?

Gillian: Yes, a shower.

Chloe: You've maybe considered moving into that room?

Patrick: Eventually.

Gillian: Well the spare room is only big enough for a single bed.

Chloe: Oh I see well that does make it less appealing.

Patrick: When there's no other option but not right now. We can manage.

Chloe: OK. And do you two manage to get out much together?

Gillian: No, we don't. But I'm happy so long as Pat can get out once in a while.

Chloe: I understand what you mean but it is important for both of you to get out of the house once in a while. It would be terribly boring just to be stuck inside all the time.

Patrick: Paul said something about a community centre? He thought there might be some transport provided?

Chloe: That's true, yes. How would you feel about that Gillian?

Gillian: Only if it's not too troublesome.

Chloe: No, we can make some enquiries and see what's going on there.

Commentary

Beatrice Gahagan

In any situation where somebody is trying to help people make decisions, whether that's decisions about moving or accepting some help or doing something differently, if they are working with two people in a relationship what they have to be sensitive to is that those changes impact on their relationship and that to just check with each person separately that they are happy with something isn't going to be sufficient because within their relationship they will have worked out their ways of being together, they will have their tasks and their roles and their responsibilities and change to those has to be negotiated and worked out between them.

Chloe: What I'd like to do is recap and make sure that I have taken everything in. We've basically looked at certain areas where you feel you might need help with mainly helping Gillian with bathing, getting dressed in the morning and possibly at night.

Gillian: Yes.

Patrick: Possibly yes.

Chloe: You've told me about your experiences with retirement homes and that you'd rather stay at home for now.

Gillian: For the time being, yes.

Patrick: We'll see how it goes.

- Chloe: Also Patrick you're concerned about leaving Gillian on her own so we are there to explore the possibilities of someone coming in for a couple of hours so that you can go out and run some errands like going to the shops or maybe do a social activity like the golf club.
- Gillian: Yes.
- Patrick: Well that's that would be a relief.
- Chloe: OK. And Patrick you would like to continue caring for Gillian at home which as far as I can tell you are obviously capable of doing so but we are going to look into the possibilities of maybe getting someone in to help with the more strenuous daily activities, make them a bit easier.
- Patrick: Well as I say that would be a relief.
- Gillian: Yes.
- Chloe: And we are going to look at the community centre as well, we will explore the options there.
- Gillian: Ooh you never had tea.
- Chloe: Go on then, white with one and then maybe we could just explore some of the financial considerations.
- Gillian: Pop the kettle on love.