Louise*, 90 and from West Sussex, has Alzheimer's disease. Her personal health budget pays for personal assistants to care for her at home, rather than a nursing home. As a result, Louise's quality of life has 'increased exponentially' says her daughter Mary*.

My mother has Alzheimer's disease, which was diagnosed fifteen years ago. She has immense trouble communicating her needs and she is difficult to understand. She also has chronic physical health problems. As a result she is totally dependent on others for her personal care and day-to-day needs.

Before having a personal health budget my mother required frequent stays in residential homes. However, these homes tended to rely on agency staff who were, in my opinion, often poorly-trained and overworked. They never seemed to have enough time to change or toilet my mother properly. Too often they never provided her with enough fluids. I was constantly worried.

My mother is now 90 and very ill. She lives with my husband and I, as she wanted to spend her final months at home, rather than in a nursing home. So I contacted my local primary care trust – NHS West Sussex – which suggested my mother might benefit from a personal health budget.

In August 2010 the trust's head of continuing healthcare and a finance officer visited. They discussed my mother's healthcare needs, how a personal health budget works, and how the funds could be used to help my mother. Soon after this initial visit she was offered a personal health budget.

This has enabled us to recruit and pay for a team of seven personal assistants who cover shifts from 8am-6.30pm every day at our home. My husband and I are responsible for my mother's care during evenings and nights.

We used a local user-led organisation to help with staff recruitment, and payroll and to advise about employment legislation. Every four weeks the personal health budget money is transferred to a bank account for my mother, as a direct payment for health care, and we use this to pay the personal assistants.

The personal health budget contains an allowance for osteopathy for my mother, as well as gloves and aprons for

*Names have been changed.
the personal assistants. It also includes funds to buy a laptop for the personal assistants to use, enabling them to input information systematically about my mother’s food and fluid intake, her blood pressure and temperature. Before the laptop, this was arduous and all written by hand. The budget also enables us to pay a suitable nursing home to care for my mother so I can take respite for a few days when I really need it.

The personal assistants provide excellent and consistent care. All seven have stayed with us since the day we recruited them, and I get such a buzz witnessing them grow as a team. Each one contributes valuable knowledge and insights. We all listen to each other and weigh up the pros and cons of each suggestion, and our aim is to be proactive and pragmatic in our approach to my mother’s care.

My mother is really benefiting from the personalised regime and her care is carefully thought-out and detailed. For example, her diet is discussed, meticulously planned and recorded to ensure she receives all vital vitamins and nutrients. My mother cannot exercise herself so the personal assistants help move her arms and legs to ensure her joints remain supple. We have also put decorations on my mother’s bedroom ceiling to provide mental stimulation.

Since my mother has had the personal health budget we have never looked back. Her quality of life has increased exponentially. Vitally, because of the expert care she receives, my mother has not required any emergency admissions to a nursing home or the hospital, avoiding traumatic upheavals for her.

All in all, my mother now lives a fulfilled and contented life. Her face almost always shows a satisfied peaceful expression. Plus, she responds positively to the familiar voices of her family and personal assistants. She is surrounded by people who not only care about her but are observant and vigilant about her needs. She is so much happier.

As told to Adam James.

A personal health budget allows people to have more choice, flexibility and control over the health services and care they receive.

The Department of Health thanks the people and families concerned for sharing their personal stories. For further information please contact:

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