

# Move to ban 'cruel' Death Pathway as patients die in error

Picture: JASON BY

## EXCLUSIVE

By **Lucy Johnston**

HEALTH EDITOR

DOCTORS are demanding a ban on the "cruel" use of the controversial death pathway following Sunday Express research revealing as many as 6,500 patients are wrongly placed on it a year.

Our figures are believed to be the first to highlight the scale of non-dying patients put on the Liverpool Care Pathway which usually involves sedation and withdrawal of food and fluids.

It is believed our findings, drawn from responses to freedom of information requests to hospital trusts, are just the tip of the iceberg and that many more vulnerable patients' lives are prematurely ended.

Professor Patrick Pullicino, a senior consultant neurologist for East Kent Hospitals NHS, is alarmed. He said:

"This is shocking and these are very important figures. Clearly the number of people wrongly put on it is more widespread than we thought and the worry is there are many others who we never know about who die."

He added: "It is not scientifically possible to predict if a patient will die within days. In hospitals there are financial pressures, targets and overcrowded wards which would influence a doctor's decision to put people on the pathway inappropriately. This system should be banned and we should go back to traditional palliative care. It is not dignifying to sedate people and take away the ability to partake in decisions."

Many experts believe thousands of lives are prematurely ended, often because they are difficult to manage or their beds are needed. Some have even likened the pathway to a form of euthanasia.

Prof Sam Ahmedzai, a senior palliative care doctor, said he was "seriously worried". He said: "Biologically some people look like they're dying but they're not. I have been a consultant in this field for nearly 30 years and I still struggle to get it right." Our

**'It's as if they put a pillow on her face'**

research follows concern highlighted at a British Medical Association meeting where medics admitted patients can be left on the pathway for weeks without having their cases reviewed.



**COMPLAINT:** Peter Tulloch, who says the pathway is tantamount to attempted murder and, left, his mother Jean

Our survey comes after police launched an investigation into the death of a woman whose son claims her "incredibly cruel" withdrawal of fluids was tantamount to attempted murder.

Peter Tulloch, 55, of Biggleswade, Bedfordshire, visited his mother Jean in hospital in March 2012 to discover that although he believes she was "far from dying" she had been isolated and placed on the Liverpool Care Pathway.

Mr Tulloch says 83-year-old mother-of-three Jean, a former TB nurse, had been recovering from a



urinary infection. When he arrived at the hospital last March he found his mother "far from dying" but "conscious and smiling".

Mr Tulloch, a London Underground engineer, told the Sunday Express: "My mother had been in good health and suddenly I was told she was being put on the Liverpool

Care Pathway. Her fluids were removed which is incredibly cruel. It is so wrong - they were effectively putting a pillow over my mother's face. Despite this she survived for nearly four weeks."

Ministers recently launched an independent review into the practice, developed in the Nineties to help dying patients in their final hours, which is expected to be published within weeks.

It has spread widely throughout the NHS following recommendations by the health watchdog the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence.

It is estimated 29 per cent of NHS deaths now involve the pathway, about 130,000 a year. Our research shows one in 20 patients - 6,500 - were removed from the pathway last year as they were not dying. The NHS said: "Patients should always be reviewed and their needs re-assessed."

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**What do you think - SHOULD DEATH PATHWAY BE BANNED?**

**YES - 0901 792 5314 ● NO - 0901 792 5315**

**YES text SXVOTEYES to 86611 ● NO text SXVOTENO to 86611**

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