

# Patients suffer as one in five hospitals fail to meet care standards

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ONE in five hospitals failed inspections as a result of poor care last year, leaving patients to endure a catalogue of neglect, new figures have revealed.

Inspectors from the Care Quality Commission (CQC) watchdog found that 45 hospitals were not meeting acceptable standards of safe

care, following 215 inspections in the year to March — a failure rate of nearly 21%. In the same period, 32 hospitals, about one in six of those inspected, did not have an adequate number of staff.

The inspectors' reports reveal extensive failings, including a trebling of bed sores in one hospital due to understaffing, patients ignored by doctors over the weekend, and others left

without vital medication or at risk of malnutrition and dehydration.

Details of the inspections were supplied by the CQC, the official care regulator, to Labour. Andy Burnham, shadow health secretary, claimed the failure rate had soared over the past year. In March last year just 16 hospitals were judged to have poor care and 14 were found to have inadequate staffing.

The CQC said the rising incidence of failed inspections was the result of the more rigorous approach the regulator had been instructed to adopt since the revelations about poor care at the Mid Staffordshire NHS trust.

All 168 hospital trusts in England and "most" of the 353 hospitals within them were inspected last year — but CQC did not measure every hospital against all 16 criteria it

examines, which is why the number of inspections for care and staffing was lower.

Eighteen hospitals failed inspections for both care and staffing levels, including flagship institutions such as the Royal London Hospital, Alder Hey Children's Hospital in Liverpool, Birmingham Heartlands Hospital and Bradford Royal Infirmary.

An October 2013 inspection in Bradford found "shortfalls

in nursing staff every day". At the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in King's Lynn, Norfolk, "the incidence of reported pressure ulcers" trebled in a year due to "insufficient staff to provide care to patients".

At Dorset County Hospital a diabetic patient did not receive insulin medication and another patient judged to need assessments every 48 hours was not looked at for "more than three weeks".

At Wexham Park Hospital in Slough, patients with chest pains were told to sit in the waiting room "contrary to a sign at reception which indicated people attending reception with chest pains should be seen by a doctor immediately".

Burnham said: "This provides indisputable proof that the NHS is heading seriously downhill on this government's watch.

"Hospitals across England are operating way beyond safe bed-occupancy levels and without enough staff."

Jeremy Hunt, the health secretary, accused Burnham of double standards. He said: "Labour made the disastrous decision to abolish expert-led inspections, which we have now reversed. Inevitably when you impose a more rigorous inspection regime you uncover more problems."