

We'll help the dying stay at home, says minister

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THE DYING should be allowed to spend their final hours at home "surrounded by love" rather than staying in hospital, the Government has said.

Lord Prior of Brampton, the minister for NHS productivity, said it was "preferable" for patients to pass away "in their own home with their loved ones" rather than alone on a ward.

He called for more action to ensure that those people who choose to die at home can be certain of receiving the finest palliative care from the health service.

His comments are the strongest indication since the election that the Government is preparing to use public money to dramatically improve health support for dying pensioners who turn down places in care homes.

Lord Prior said NHS England was "reviewing this whole area" and would report back later in the year, hinting

that the government was ready to change policy on the back of recommendations.

He made the remarks in a debate in the House of Lords on palliative care amid concerns that the NHS is failing to provide sufficient end of life support for people who choose to die at home. Lord Wills, a Labour peer, spoke of how his father-in-law had passed away in February after a nurse refused to visit their house, despite repeat calls for help.

He said: "He died at home, surrounded by those he loved and who loved him.

"However, he died in profound agitation because he was denied the palliative care that he so desperately needed." Lord Wills described how the local GP surgery said a Macmillan nurse had to provide the care, before detailing the several failed attempts to persuade her to give medical assistance as his father-in-law neared death.

He told the House: "She was rung repeatedly throughout the day but never answered

the phone.

"Finally, at 4.30pm she picked up the phone and said that she could not come until the next day - even when the nurse who was looking after my father-in-law said that he was likely to be dead by then.

"She said there was nothing she could do about it and rang

'The nurse was rung repeatedly but never answered'

off. He died later that evening, without the comfort of any palliative care."

The "truly tragic" story prompted Lord Prior to say that it was better for elderly people to spend their final hours at home. He promised better palliative care for people who make that choice.

Lord Prior said: "The noble Lord's story illustrates the fact

that it is not just where people die but how they die that matters.

"It is clearly preferable that people should die in their own home with their loved ones, surrounded by the love that the noble Lord described, but symptom control, pain relief and everything that goes with palliative care are just as important."

Should the Government decide to commit more funds to providing end-of-life care at home the money would need to be found from an increasingly tight NHS budget.

Britain's population is ageing rapidly: the proportion of people aged 65 and over is expected to jump from 18 per cent to 26 per cent within 50 years.

The Office for Budget Responsibility warned recently that the growing pensions and long-term care bill means the country could return to deficit within years of reaching an expected surplus in 2018/19.

Shirley Teasdale June 2015