

Patients kept alive against wish in delays on paperwork

By **John Bingham**
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PATIENTS who do not want to be given life-saving treatment if their condition deteriorates are being kept alive against their will because of delays in processing paperwork registering their wishes, according to lawyers.

Demand has surged for Lasting Power of Attorney (LPA) arrangements in which people appoint a loved one to make financial or life-and-death treatment decisions on their behalf if they no longer have the capacity to do so themselves.

Analysis of government figures suggests the number making such arrangements has almost doubled in two years.

The rise in demand is thought to be linked to an increase in dementia diagnoses as the impact of Britain's ageing population begins to be felt.

The condition has overtaken heart disease as the biggest cause of death for women in recent years and the second most common for men.

Specialists at the law firm JMW Solicitors calculate that the number of people in England and Wales making LPA arrangements rose by 89 per cent between 2013 and 2015 to 510,925.

At one point, cases were typically taking 84 working days to process, more than twice the office's target, but the backlog has since been cleared.

Elaine Roche, of JMW's private client department, said figures suggest that the Office of the Public Guardian, the Birmingham-based body responsible for recording all LPAs, had been struggling to cope with the increase.

"Such hold-ups prevent doctors finding out if a patient might have made clear they want to refuse medical support," she said.

"I am aware of instances in which that has already happened."