

Poor home care

'creating a living hell'

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Dementia sufferers are left hungry, thirsty and soiled because of "harrowing" neglect hidden behind closed doors, campaigners say.

Sub-standard home care is having devastating consequences for people with dementia as untrained staff struggle with everyday tasks, the Alzheimer's Society warns. Older people have ended up in hospital, moving to a care home or even wandering into the road because of poor care that can make life a "living hell" for families, a report concludes.

About half of Britain's 850,000 dementia sufferers rely on care workers to help them at home but research by the charity concludes that they are being let down by a "blind spot" in the system.

"It's pretty frightening what we've found," said Jeremy Hughes, chief executive of the charity, arguing that there would be a national outcry if similar failings were seen away from people's homes. "Care scandals in hos-

pitals and care homes have been well publicised, yet unacceptable home-care practices are widespread and happen behind closed doors, hidden from public scrutiny," he said.

More than a third of home-care workers on whom dementia patients rely for everyday living have no training in dealing with the condition, freedom of information requests from 119 councils reveal. Only 2 per cent of people with dementia say training is good enough and half say workers do not understand how to look after them, a survey of 1,227 patients finds.

Mr Hughes added: "Poor care at home has devastating, life-changing consequences for someone living with dementia and their family. People affected by dementia have told us about ending up in hospital because home-care workers failed to identify an infection, spending the day in soiled clothing as no one could calm their agitation enough to help them change, and walking outside and into the middle of the

road at night as their home wasn't left secure." One woman said that her father was left living on biscuits and wasted away to seven stone because of poor home care. Another said that her grandmother was taken to intensive care after she was made sick by eating out-of-date food left in the fridge.

Simple communication training allows care workers to make sure people with dementia understand what is happening and ensure they are given food when hungry, the charity argues.

Urging the government to address a "desperate situation", Mr Hughes said an extra £25 million for better training would pay for itself by cutting hospital admissions and reducing the need for people to move to care homes.

Workers themselves recognised the problem and were "crying out for more training", with 43 per cent asking employers for help, according to the charity's survey of 739 staff. However, half of these requests were turned down. "From the scandals we have exposed, it

is clear they are not fairly or adequately equipped with the skills they need," he said.

Companies' funding has been squeezed as councils deal with cuts to budgets for social care. Colin Angel, of the industry group the UK Homecare Association, blamed funding problems, saying: "It is never acceptable that people receive inadequate care."

A spokeswoman for the Department of Health said: "Over 100,000 social care workers have already received dementia awareness training. We expect social care providers to provide appropriate training on dementia to staff."

● Almost 700,000 older people in need of some sort of support are being left to fend for themselves, a charity has warned. Age UK said 696,500 people who needed help with tasks such as getting out of bed, going to the lavatory, washing and getting dressed, were struggling to cope without any support at all. Meanwhile, 487,400 received some help but not enough, the charity added.