

Mental health patients forced to travel over 500 miles for treatment

Kat Lay Health Correspondent

Patients are being sent more than 500 miles away from home for mental health treatment, according to figures that show a 40 per cent rise in people sent out of area.

Some parts of England have no beds at all for female patients in need of intensive psychiatric care, according to data released by the British Medical Association.

One patient from Somerset had been sent to the Scottish Highlands for treatment, 587 miles away. Two patients from the Oxford area were also sent to Scotland, with one travelling 532 miles to New Craigs Hospital, Inverness, and the other 497 miles to Royal Cornhill Hospital, NHS Grampian.

A Dorset patient was sent 323 miles to the Priory Middleton facility, near Darlington, and a patient of the Leeds and York Partnership NHS Foundation trust was sent 312 miles to Glenbourne Unit Berrisode in Plymouth.

Andrew Molodynski, an NHS consultant psychiatrist and the mental health policy spokesman for the BMA's consultants committee, said: "We would never tolerate a situation in which a stroke victim in Somerset had to travel to the Highlands for treatment, and yet this is the reality for some mental health patients. The huge distances often involved rule out regular visits from friends and relatives at a time in their lives when their support matters most."

The BMA obtained the figures through freedom of information requests to NHS trusts and clinical commissioning groups, finding 5,876 adults were sent out of area for mental health treatment in 2016-17, a rise of almost 40 per cent from 4,213 in 2014-15. The costs of such placements rose from £108 million to £159 million.

The responses also revealed that Leicestershire, Derbyshire and parts of north London had no NHS beds for female patients in need of intensive psy-

Moving for care

The five trusts that sent the most adults out of area in 2016-17 were:

Kent and Medway NHS and Social Care Partnership Trust **586 patients**

Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust **410**

Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust **372**

Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation Trust **359**

Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust **316**

chiatric care. Dr Molodynski said that doctors had to take time away from patients in order to search for beds and added: "Patients then face long waits before being taken miles in locked ambulances to unfamiliar places."

David Knight, 29, killed himself after being sent for treatment at a hospital

150 miles away from his home in Cornwall. At his inquest, coroner Emma Carlyon said that the out-of-area placement was "very likely" to have had a bearing on his death.

A Department of Health spokeswoman said: "Of course it is completely unacceptable for patients to be sent hundreds of miles away from their family and friends for treatment — but that is exactly why we've committed to end inappropriate placements by 2020.

"We were the first country in the world to legislate for parity of esteem and we're going to make sure it happens by reforming outdated mental health laws and with waiting time targets to improve standards of care."

● Slow and outdated IT systems mean soldiers could be deployed without proper medical checks, the former head of the hospital at Camp Bastion in Afghanistan has warned. GPs in the military complain that the system to check records and print prescriptions is too slow to let them do their job safely.

59 miles 27.6 17