

Doctors warn of crisis in care as elderly abuse cases increase

By Laura Donnelly HEALTH EDITOR

REPORTS of abuse and neglect of the elderly have risen by a third amid warnings from GPs that the care system is "rapidly disintegrating".

New figures show that the number of referred cases involving adults - usually elderly or disabled - rose from 4,194 in 2013/14 to 5,615 in 2015/16, an increase of 33 per cent.

Meanwhile, cases involving children have also risen, with 7,906 reports in 2015/16, an increase of four per cent in two years.

Safeguarding concerns are lodged with social services or police when it is feared that a vulnerable person is being targeted for abuse or neglect.

But a poll of more than 800 GPs found 33 per cent said they were unable to contact social services when attempting to make such referrals, with 42 per cent saying they faced unacceptable delays in action being taken.

Overall, the survey found that 59 per cent said the response from social services was inadequate.

The statistics, revealed under Freedom of Information disclosures, were part of an investigation by *Pulse* magazine.

Dr Robert Morley, from the British Medical Association, said the statistics reflected pressures across the country in a system which was "rapidly disintegrating".

Dr Ayesha Sharieff, GP and safeguarding lead for her practice in south London, said her team had "huge problems" getting in touch with social care.

She said it was often "impossible" to get hold of social workers, who were often found to have left or be on stress-

related leave. Caroline Abrahams, charity director at charity Age UK, said the findings were "truly frightening".

"You would expect any referral to social services from a GP to be seen as a top priority," she said.

"The fact that approaching two-thirds of GPs are reporting the response back was inadequate tells you all you need to know about the enormous pressures on our underfunded social care system."

Earlier this week, council chiefs said cuts to social care would continue despite ministers putting in an extra £1bn

'GPs say the response back is inadequate - that tells you about the enormous pressures on the system'

to meet extra pressures this year. Local authorities in England intend to make £824m of savings in their social care budgets, a survey of social services leaders found.

Last year, research revealed that nine in 10 care workers had witnessed abuse in homes, with pensioners tied to chairs, starved and turned into the victims of cruel pranks.

The study by Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council found widespread neglect and attacks on care home residents, with psychological games most commonly cited as the type of abuse witnessed.

The anonymous survey of staff at five new care homes found that 88 per cent had witnessed or suspected abuse in nursing homes which previously employed them.

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