

Daily Telegraph 17 August 2017

Neglected elderly left to suffer in silence at our hospitals

Ombudsman rebuke after litany of complaints from worried relatives

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HOSPITAL patients are being forced to wear “adult nappies” because nurses have no time to attend to even the most basic needs, the Health Service Ombudsman has reported.

His report finds that elderly and vulnerable patients are too scared to complain and are being left to “suffer in silence” amid a litany of failings by NHS hospitals.

In one case, an elderly man was forced to call for emergency help after being left in agony after a fall in hospital. He waited 75 minutes before help arrived.

In another, a man who suffered a stroke in hospital was left without help for five hours, by which time it was too late, relatives said.

Research by website Gransnet and the ombudsman found that one in three family members had raised concerns about the care of relatives in hospital.

Families said elderly patients could not get help to reach the lavatory and instead had to wear nappies. Some were left sitting in their own filth, and some were left unwashed for days.

In other cases, they said their loved ones had been shouted at, treated like children, or subjected to nurses laughing at their misery.

The Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman and Gransnet surveyed 600 people who had an elderly family member in hospital in the past year. In total, 35 per cent said they had concerns about the care their loved ones received – and half of those said they found it difficult to complain.

Rob Behrens, the ombuds-

man, said too many older people were left “suffering in silence” and that the NHS needed to convince patients that their care would not be compromised if a concern was lodged.

Other complaints described by respondents included waits of more than an hour for patients who asked for help, pensioners left for up to 16 hours without food, and some who waited up to a week without a shower.

One relative said: “If we didn’t visit at meal times I don’t think my father would have eaten as he wasn’t able to feed himself but the staff didn’t feed him either.”

Another said nurses “fell about laughing” when an elderly relative fell out of bed.

One woman said her hus-

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band called for help within the hospital, after being left lying on the hospital floor after suffering a fall.

“No one came. He lay on the floor for 75 minutes in agony before a doctor could be found,” she told the survey.

Another said her father-in-law had been left on a bed pan for over an hour and was only helped off when family visited.

Some relatives said those in hospital were left at risk from other patients. One said: “My mother was groped by a male patient coming into her room. When I complained I was told ‘Oh yes, he gets confused’”

A spokesman for NHS Improvement said: “Feedback from patients and their families on their care and experience is and will remain critical in helping the NHS provide the high standards of care that the service strives to deliver every day.”

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