

No end to NHS crisis in sight, nurses warn

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The NHS crisis will continue well beyond winter, the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) has said, after the latest performance figures showed there were hospitals without a single bed free.

On four days last week more than 95 per cent of hospital beds were occupied, weekly data from NHS England showed. Levels above 85 per cent raise serious safety concerns. Eight hospital trusts had no free beds on some days.

Dame Donna Kinnair, the director of nursing, policy and practice at the RCN, said: "When this happens, it becomes extremely difficult for A&E departments to get new patients admitted as emergencies, which leads to huge backlogs in A&E [...] Many trusts are desperate to open more beds but simply don't have enough nurses to staff them. Unless hospitals can free up more beds the current crisis is going to continue well beyond the winter."

On average there were 45,732 patients in hospital at any one time who had been there for more than a week, with 17,812 there for 21 days or more.

An NHS England spokesman said that an increase in flu and norovirus cases had put pressure on hospitals but that the NHS was "generally coping". He urged the public to use the NHS 111 phoneline and pharmacists for advice where possible.

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