

'No real strategy' to fill thousands of NHS vacancies

CHRONIC NHS understaffing poses a serious risk to patient safety, a report warns today. Health and social care services in England face "the greatest workforce crisis in their history" and the Government lacks a real plan to tackle it, say MPs.

They point to Nuffield Trust research that says the NHS in England is short of 12,000 hospital doctors and more than 30,000 nurses and midwives. The Health and Social Care Committee said maternity services are "under unsustainable pressure", while the number of full-time equivalent GPs fell by more than 700 over three years to March 2022.

Midwives

Experts suggest an extra 475,000 jobs will be needed in health care by the early part of the next decade.

The committee is chaired by ex-health secretary Jeremy Hunt who in 2019 promised to deliver 5,000 more GPs by 2025. The target was not met.

The Conservatives pledged at the last general election to recruit 6,000 more GPs but that too will not be met.

The report said: "The persistent understaffing of the NHS now poses a serious risk to staff and patient safety both for routine and emergency care. It also costs more as patients present later with more serious illness. "But most depressing for many on the frontline is the absence of any credible strategy to address it."

The NHS is under pressure due to staff sickness caused by anxiety, stress and depression. Mr Hunt said: "We now face the greatest workforce crisis in history in the NHS and in social care with still no idea of the number of additional doctors, nurses and other professionals we actually need."

"NHS professionals know there is no silver bullet to solve this problem but we should at least be giving them comfort that a plan is in place. This must be a top priority for the new PM."

The report said almost all of the NHS was suffering, with 152 midwives quitting last year. Patricia Marquis, at the Royal College of Nursing, demanded better pay for nurses and said: "Persistent understaffing in all care settings poses a serious risk to staff and patient safety should shock ministers into action."

The Department of Health and Social Care said it was recruiting 4,000 more doctors and 3,800 more nurses last year. It had asked NHS England for a "long term plan to recruit and support members of staff".

Fifth of family GPs are part-timers

MANY GPs are spending just 26 hours a week with patients as they also do research, NHS leadership and private side-lines.

Meanwhile patients are struggling to get appointments and \$.6 million need treatment.

The Government's GP Workforce Survey shows nearly one in five family doctors has four or fewer half-day patient sessions a week working an average of just 25.7 hours.

The average GP was doing a 47.7-hour week in 2001, which fell to 41.8 hours by 2017. Last year, the survey found the typical working week, including admin, was 38.4 hours.

Doctors want an action plan,

By Giles Shelbrick

including a recruitment and retention strategy, a pay beyond hiring 6,000 more GPs.

Others want to live up to time by slashing unnecessary bureaucracy, more investment in IT upgrades and a £2 billion programme to fix crumbling surgery buildings.

Latest figures suggest 1.8 million patients have used a paid-for GP and the lowest levels of satisfaction with NHS family doctors.

Professor Martin Marshall, chairman of the Royal College of GPs, said: "The job is no longer feasible full-time."

Fears for safety of care residents as toll of inspection surges to 6,000

EXCLUSIVE
By Giles Shelbrick
Chief Reporter

FOUR in 10 care homes have not been inspected since Covid-19 erupted, alarming data reveals.

Just 8,398 were visited by assessors in person - 59 per cent of the total - at a time temporary facilities were begging authorities to intervene.

It means relatives of sick and vulnerable residents - some routinely denied visiting rights - have no idea whether more than 6,000 others are safe, effective, caring or well-managed. That's because on-site scrutiny has taken place for less than a half year.

Disgruntled campaigners told the Care Quality Commission regulator to shape up or ship out.

Helen Wildbore, director of the Relatives & Residents Association, said: "These figures show the stark reality of CQC's lack of action to protect people in the pandemic."

"Older people are being badly let down when they need them the most."

Around one in five homes is currently rated inadequate or requiring improvement according to the CQC. But specialists fear the care crisis could be significantly worse because inspectors failed to show up at a time families were banned.

Lost

That effectively means no one can be sure of what was happening inside facilities, some charging £1,000 a week.

Figures also show one quarter of care home residents live in falling surroundings - so 100,000 are stuck in a home where their safety could be at risk.

The Daily Express asked the watchdog how the 13,054 homes it is responsible for are rated and how many in-person probes were carried out between the first national lockdowns on March 23, 2020 and July 1 this year.

Inspections across 831 days totalled 12,050. But 576 of those homes are now inactive or deregulated. It means 6,158 homes have not been checked. Some 231 are ranked inadequate and 2,489 requiring improvement. A further 464 have no published rating while there is insufficient evidence to pass judgment on how.

Ms Wildbore added: "With one in five people living in a poor care home and almost half of homes not inspected since the start of the pandemic, people are lost in the system with no one to safeguard their rights. The regulator needs an urgent wake-up call."

Despite a vicious crusade spearheaded by furious families, ministers have refused to make visiting a legal right.

CQC claims it is powerless to act, saying it is governed by regulations set by Parliament.

Homes and hospitals remain free to dictate terms of access because official guidance remains voluntary, not mandatory.

Parliament's Joint Committee on Human Rights last week said thousands of care home residents and their families had been failed by those with a legal duty to protect them because draconian visiting restrictions, implemented at the height of Covid-19, still exist.

It called for the immediate implementation of legal rights to allow access, which could see the introduction of Glenda's Law, named after the mother of actress



Rare time together... care home resident Joan with husband Tony and daughter Judith

Heartache 'is form of abuse'

By Giles Shelbrick

HELPLESS Judith Anisimowski said the pain and heartache endured by care home residents and their families throughout Covid is "nothing short of abuse".

For two and a half years her mother Joan Gray, 87 - married for 65 years to Tony, 89 - has been unable to see most of her family due to draconian rules.

Judith, 64, blames the Newcastle facility, which is rated good, has been locked down for 127 days this year already due to outbreaks.

She said: "Mum has dementia and other severe health and mobility problems. "Dad was struggling to look after her until she was hospitalised in 2020. She was then discharged into nursing care."

"Aside from a few socially distanced garden visits and Zoom calls, which she didn't understand and couldn't engage with, we had no meaningful contact."

"She couldn't understand why we couldn't see her and lost a lot of weight. "It was really distressing for us when she was too upset to take part in a call with us on her birthday and we heard her crying, saying she wished she was dead."

"Despite the visiting ban, Covid went right through the home and she got that and pneumonia in December 2020 and spent two weeks in hospital. She then got Covid again this year at Easter."

Judith added: "The home has been locked down more than it has been open this year, despite all the jobs, and still having to test and use PPE. Dad is the only one allowed to visit in an outbreak but at his age, he's not always up to it."

"People in homes have been forgotten. It's nothing short of abuse and I can't believe it's still happening."

Ruthie Henshall, who died in a care home in May 2021, aged 98.

The committee made a stinging attack on CQC and the Department of Health and Social Care, which drew up the guidance.

It stated: "Some restrictions on visiting rights that were implemented in national lockdowns persist in the care sector, despite Government guidance indicating 'there should not normally be any restrictions to visits into or out of the care home'."

"The Joint Committee finds restrictions can be harmful to care users and detrimental to their wellbeing." The cross-party group,

chaired by SNP MP Aunna Cherry, warned gaps remain in how vulnerable people are protected in care, leaving their human rights at risk.

The intervention follows a warning "harm and misery" are still

being endured by millions in a broken health and social care system.

CQC ranks homes as outstanding, good, requires improvement, or inadequate and makes ratings based on inspections. Figures also show 11,229 are good and 639 outstanding. Kate Tyrrell, chief Inspector of Adult Social Care, said: "The pandemic has been particularly difficult for those living in care homes and their families."

"We have taken action throughout to help keep people safe in care settings, including undertaking more than 12,000 inspections."

"CQC made a decision to pause routine inspections during the pandemic in part to limit the number of people entering care homes. However, as part of our new strategy, we have continued to inspect based on risk and the intelligence we build on providers."

"CQC has also conducted over 12,100 calls to providers as part of an Emergency Support Framework."

COMMENT
HELEN WILDBORE
Relatives & Residents Association

Inappropriate use of "do not attempt resuscitation" notices, the report of the Joint Committee

on Human Rights is an indictment of the lack of action to protect the rights of people in vulnerable situations.

In January I gave evidence to the committee, sharing the devastating impact of abuse, neglect and lack of family contact.

But there also stories which wouldn't make the headlines, such as the subtle erosion of dignity each time a person is dressed in someone else's clothes or is left without their

glasses or dentures. Now the committee's report shines a spotlight on many of the concerns we raised and several of our recommendations mirror our calls for change - not least our drive for a new legal right to support from a relative or friend in health and care settings.

The committee's report is particularly severe about the lack of action by the regulator to safeguard people's rights.

Having heard "serious criticism" about the Care Quality

Commission during the inquiry, it stressed that the regulator must adequately monitor compliance with expected standards and hold providers accountable in a timely way - in other words, "do your job".

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