Care homes are failing residents with dementia

Charity’s report identifies ‘shocking examples’ of inadequate access to healthcare services

By Nick Evans

THE NHS is providing a second-class service to care home residents with dementia in England, a report says.

The Alzheimer’s Society review found serious concerns about access to health services and identified cases where people had been left bed-bound, incontinent and sedated because of the lack of help.

The charity surveyed 285 care home managers in partnership with Care England, which represents care homes, as well as recording first-hand testimonies.

Nearly half of managers said they felt the NHS was not providing adequate and timely access to services such as physiotherapy, continence and mental health care.

One in five also reported being charged by GP practices for services that should be free on the NHS. The average charge was just over £12,000 – enough to fund a specialist dementia care home place for almost six months.

The report, which was published just ahead of Dementia Awareness Week in May, also highlighted what it called ‘shocking examples’ of care. These included people:

- Being prescribed pain relief over the phone for a broken collar bone.
- Waiting three months for continence products.
- Being restrained under an emergency Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard because of a lack of mental health care.
- Waiting a year for physiotherapy following surgery.
- Being refused an out-of-hours appointment.

Alzheimer’s Society chief executive Jeremy Hughes said the findings were ‘unacceptable’ and the lack of care was having an impact on the ‘dignity, self-esteem and independence’ of care home residents.

‘People with dementia living in care homes are just as entitled to receive free care from the NHS as anyone else,’ he said.

RCN professional lead for older people and dementia care Dawne Garrett said the findings were ‘sadly’ something nurses working in the sector were ‘all too well aware of’.

She said hospital staff needed to be ‘reaching out much more to care homes’.

But she also said the number of nurses and care assistants in the sector and the experience they have was also an issue.

‘Turnover of nurses and care assistants in the sector is running at about 30%,’ she added.

Independent nurse consultant Deborah Sturdy agreed, saying: ‘These findings are a true reflection I’m afraid.’

Care England chief executive Martin Green said care homes were in a difficult position because they had been ‘all but abandoned’ by the NHS.

But an NHS England spokesperson said the two sectors were beginning to work more closely under the vanguard programme, part of the NHS Five-Year Forward View work.

‘No NHS GP practice should be charging patients or care homes for services that everyone is entitled to,’ he added.

The report is available at tinyurl.com/hwete3g

Call for extra funds to meet end of life needs

EXTRA FUNDING for end of life community care is needed to help cope with growing numbers of people dying from cancer, a charity has warned.

Macmillan Cancer Support estimates that in England almost 144,000 people a year will die from the disease by 2020 – a rise of 15,000 patients annually compared with 2010.

The charity called on the government to invest in out-of-hours community services to enable more patients to die in their own home.

Improving staff training is one action NHS England is taking to bring improvements, a Department of Health spokesperson said.

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Strokestra hits the right note for recovery

NURSES ARE helping people recovering from stroke to get involved in an orchestra.

The Strokestra, based in Hull, includes a 90-year-old bass guitarist. The initiative is supported by the Hull Integrated Community Stroke Service (HICSS), part of Humber NHS Foundation Trust.

HICSS clinical lead nurse Carol Hargreaves co-ordinates sessions for a group of stroke patients who play a range of instruments from trombones and horns to guitars and maracas. They write their own music under the guidance of a creative director, and play with members of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra.

Ms Hargreaves said the project helps to improve patients’ mobility, speech, communication and confidence.

Ms Hargreaves is pictured bottom right with (from bottom left) stroke survivor Maureen Frankish, Royal Philharmonic bassoonist Fraser Gordon and clinical psychologist Michelle Wilson.