Number of alcohol-related deaths rising in older people

Charity DrugScope says that ‘invisible’ issue highlights need for age-appropriate interventions

By Lisa Berry
DRUG AND alcohol misuse problems among older people are on the rise in the UK, according to a charity.

A report by DrugScope says more are drinking too much and alcohol-related hospital admissions and deaths are on the increase. For people aged 75 years and older, such deaths are at their highest level since 1991 when records began.

Drug misuse was also an increasing problem in older people, it said.

The charity says services need to be targeted specifically at older people with substance misuse problems. Its chief executive Marcus Roberts said: ‘Drug and alcohol policy and practice – and the attention of the media – invariably focus on young people.

‘Drugs and alcohol issues may affect older people differently, but that does not make them less real or important. They may be a symptom of other problems, such as loneliness and isolation, caring for a partner, bereavement or the struggle to make ends meet.

‘We need to develop a range of age-appropriate interventions, and to make the connections between drug and alcohol issues and older people policy, nationally and locally. It’s time to bring this largely “invisible” issue into the light.’

DrugScope says that funding for existing services must also be sustained or increased. It says healthcare professionals should be trained to give advice on sensible drinking to older people.

Alcohol nurse specialist at Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust Adrian Brown said: ‘Nurses should not exclude the possibility of substance misuse just because of someone’s age.

‘Community nurses may detect problems by visiting people at home, and often issues are only uncovered when someone is admitted to hospital. For example, it might be thought that an accident occurred because an older person is frail, but use of alcohol, medication or illicit drugs should always be considered, especially as it may be an opportunity to offer helpful interventions to reduce any problem use.’

Nurse specialists can communicate their value with online tool

AN ONLINE resource that enables nurse specialists to communicate the value of their care has been launched.

Apollo offers tools to help nurse specialists develop job plans, service summaries and key performance indicators.

Research by the RCN has identified that nurse specialists are pivotal members of the multidisciplinary team, offering holistic care and case management. However, the economic climate in the NHS has placed increasing pressure on nurse specialists and some report being unable to deliver the complex care they would wish.

Apollo co-developer and colorectal nurse Terri Porrett said: ‘Nurses are not taught to be business astute, write annual reports or promote their services. Apollo allows them to communicate their value.’

Suit gives employees a sense of what it is like to be frail

AN AGE simulation suit is being used to help train staff working with older patients and those with dementia at hospitals in Yorkshire.

Mid Yorkshire Hospitals NHS Trust will use the suit to train all employees, from consultants to porters.

The suit uses weights and straps to restrict movement, while headphones and goggles simulate loss of hearing and vision.

Senior sister Anita Ruckledge (pictured) said: ‘The suit allows us to empathise with patients who have age-related symptoms or dementia. It’s a way of understanding just what everyday life is like for them.

‘It gives an insight into how the joints move as we get older and how it might be difficult to do things that we take for granted. It can make patients feel very out of control.’