Dementia care in hospitals still poor

By Lisa Berry
ONE IN ten hospitals does not provide dementia awareness training for nurses or healthcare assistants despite one quarter of inpatients having the disease, a major national audit has found.

In addition, two in five hospitals neither include dementia awareness training in staff induction programmes, nor provide it for support staff such as receptionists.

The findings were revealed in the second report of the National Audit of Dementia. Chair of the audit steering group Peter Crome said: ‘Everyone working in the NHS must accept that the care of people with dementia is a core part of its business. Hopefully, with strong leadership at all levels future audit will show positive change.’

The audit examined the care structures of more than 200 hospitals in England and Wales and the case notes of almost 8,000 dementia patients admitted for five days or more.

There has been progress in some areas since the first report in 2011, including a 10 per cent drop in prescriptions for antipsychotic drugs. Nearly 90 per cent of case notes indicated that nutritional assessments had been carried out.

But the report also noted that while many patients with dementia develop acute confusion in hospital, less than half of the sample had been assessed for delirium. Only half had received an assessment of their mental state. The report described these assessment rates as ‘alarmingly low’.

Not a priority
Head of policy and public affairs at Alzheimer’s Society George McNamara said it was ‘scandalous’ that dementia care was not a ‘priority’ for hospitals.

‘We know that staff want to improve their knowledge of dementia care, but they need to be offered the right tools, support and training to do so,’ he said. ‘Without a serious culture change to ensure that new policies are being put into everyday practice, care cannot and will not improve.’

Funding boosts pilot projects to redesign acute wards

MORE THAN 100 hospitals and care homes have been given a share of Department of Health funds totalling £50 million to develop dementia-friendly environments.

The projects will form part of a pilot scheme in England to help hospitals identify which types of physical changes are most beneficial for patients with dementia.

Guy’s and St Thomas’ NHS Foundation Trust in London will receive nearly £1 million for its project Designing the Dementia Journey. The hospital’s older people’s wards feature colour-coded bays and symbols, pictured, to help patients find the way back to their beds. Patients with dementia wear blue wristbands to alert staff to their needs and the red-tray system is used so that staff know which patients require extra help with meals.

The funding will enable these initiatives to be implemented in other high priority wards across the trust.

Alzheimer’s Society chief executive Jeremy Hughes said: ‘Moving into a care home or spending time in hospital can be a difficult transition for people with dementia, and often the buildings and grounds are not laid out in a way that supports staff to deliver good quality care. Investment in pioneering projects that create dementia-friendly environments will play a vital part in helping to improve the care hospitals or care homes can provide.’

Report recommendations include employment of specialist nurses in line with RCN guidelines of at least one whole time equivalent dementia nurse for every 300 admissions a year.

RCN general secretary Peter Carter said that specialist nurses can reduce length of stay, prevent readmissions and provide education and leadership for other staff: ‘We must not deny our most vulnerable patients these improvements in care, and dementia specialist nurses should be a priority.’

The audit was commissioned by the Healthcare Quality Improvement Partnership and carried out by the Royal College of Psychiatrists’ Centre for Quality Improvement in partnership with other organisations.

Find out more
To download the report go to tinyurl.com/nll3lym

Join the debate online
Should dementia awareness training be mandatory for all staff? Go to www.nursingolderpeople.co.uk to vote. Last issue we asked: ‘Can implementation of nursing models improve care?’ Your response was ‘yes’ 59 per cent and ‘no’ 41 per cent.