

Thousands with dementia being ‘dumped’ in A&E wards every day

Lack of social care at home has caused massive rise in number of patients who are forced into long stays in hospital

By Laura Donnelly, Health Editor

MORE than 1,000 dementia patients a day are being admitted to hospital accident-and-emergency units, some ending up stuck on wards for months.

The number of cases admitted to hospital as emergencies has risen by a third in five years, with hundreds of pensioners left to endure stays of up to a year, official figures show.

The Alzheimer’s Society said the “collapsing social care system” meant vulnerable patients who should have received help at home were instead being admitted to hospital in the crisis.

The charity warned that tens of thousands were being “dumped” on wards for months, for want of care services to look after them once discharged. NHS statistics show there were 379,004 emergency admissions for Alzheimer’s patients in 2017-18, a rise of 100,000 from 2012-13.

It means that almost half of those in England with a dementia diagnosis have gone to A&E in just one year.

In total, 40,000 spent at least a month in hospital, with 412 there for between six months and a year.

The charity estimates the rise in dementia emergency admissions costs the NHS around £280 million a year.

Boris Johnson has pledged to draw up a social care reform plan within 12 months, and that no one will have to sell their home to fund social care.

Jeremy Hughes, chief executive of the Alzheimer’s Society, said too many Alzheimer’s sufferers were ending up in hospital because of avoidable emergencies, such as infections, falls and dehydration.

“People with dementia are all too often being dumped in hospital and left for long stays,” he said. “Many are only admitted because there’s no social care support to keep them safe at home. They are commonly spending more than twice as long in hospital as needed, confused and scared.”

In the last year of her life, Dorothy Boschi spent more than seven months in hospital, after three emergency admissions due to falls and infections. She died in January 2019, aged 97. Her daughter Daphne Havercroft, 63, from Gloucestershire, said: “I had to fight so hard to get her released so she didn’t spend her last Christmas in hospital. The system has lost sight of the person it’s meant to be providing for.”

Social care provision in England is means-tested. People with more than £23,500 in savings or assets have to pay, but councils are forcing growing numbers to pay for care which used to be free, and 45 per cent of all care home residents now pay their own fees. The charity wants £8 billion a year for social care to be allocated in the spring budget, and immediate cross-party talks on reform of the system.

A Department of Health and Social Care spokesman said: “We have given councils an extra £1.5 billion next year for children and adult social care.”