NHS hospitals open own care homes to tackle beds crisis

Chris Smyth, Health Editor
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The cost of running homes and sending workers to visit older people is still cheaper than seeing wards full and A&Es congested, managers say. Photo PETER BYRNE/PRESS ASSOCIATION

NHS hospitals are opening their own nursing homes and employing their own home helps to deal with a crisis in the elderly care system.

The health service is increasingly having to take responsibility for looking after frail people who do not need to be in hospital, as cuts to council care budgets mean the elderly are denied help eating, dressing and washing.

The cost of running homes and sending workers to visit older people is still cheaper than seeing wards full, A&Es congested and operations cancelled because of delays getting people out of hospital, managers say.
Some hospitals have taken on full responsibility for the social care systems from councils in an attempt to join up services more effectively. While national leaders believe this kind of arrangement is the long-term future of the NHS, changes in some areas have been driven by the need to stop hospitals filling up.

In Dartford, the NHS has leased its own nursing home to look after patients while help going home is arranged. The East Kent Hospitals Foundation Trust is also drawing up plans to open its own nursing homes to get patients off wards and where some people will live permanently.

Bed-blocking is up 30 per cent in a year and, with an ageing population, managers believe that without new ways of looking after elderly patients, hospitals will be overwhelmed. “I think this is the beginning of a trend,” said Saffron Cordery, director of policy at the hospitals’ group NHS Providers. “Other trusts have started doing different kinds of social care activity. . . in response to a lack of support in their area. What they’ve decided to do is put in place something that can help them deal with flow through the hospital.”

Izzi Seccombe, of the Local Government Association, said that it would make more sense to rescue councils with a £1.3 billion funding injection to improve their own services. “Getting people out of hospital more quickly and back living at home will only work properly if councils get enough resource to properly fund adult social care,” she said.

This week inspectors at the Care Quality Commission warned that the elderly care system was dragging the NHS down as hospitals were overwhelmed by hundreds of thousands of people who were denied help in staying well. While the number of people over 85 has increased by a third in the past decade, council budgets for social care have not increased, meaning 200,000 fewer people getting help with everyday life. This makes them more likely to become ill and also means they cannot safely be sent home from hospital if support is not there.
Hospitals in Oxford and Ipswich have started employing care workers who go home with elderly patients to help them to adapt and offer help.

Ms Cordery said that even the costs of building nursing homes could be better value than opening new wards or seeing hospitals grind to a halt. “Trusts wouldn’t be making that kind of investment just to make life easier,” she said. “Financially they need to do something.”

Conscience speaking
What amazes me is this - social funded care does not pay for private providers and so they close. Now they are saying they should build their own - what the hell is wrong with the NHS and these managers - why didn't you properly fund the care homes that were open or why don't you lease the struggling homes from providers. Someone please tell me they know what they are doing?

Paddy Arkwright
It is about time that Britain considered the concept of retirement villages, such as the one we live in in Cape Town. 1 and 2 bedroom cottages, with a central admin and entertainment building, and a dining room serving a hot 3-course midday meal every day. The residents organise their own sports, activities and entertainment and keep an eye out for each other. I liken it to being on a cruise ship, or in a holiday resort! But you are not obliged to mingle if you choose not to.
There is a fully staffed and equipped Frail Care centre for those folk who are no longer able to look after themselves in their cottages, and even an Assisted Living wing for those who need a bit of help but are not yet ready to move into Frail Care. When/if a resident does move, their cottage is resold and some of the profit plowed back into the upkeep of the village.
If the UK followed this example, it would free up thousands of large family homes being lived in by lonely, single old people or elderly couples, and of course remove the pressure from the NHS to act as Nanny.

There are plenty of examples of various schemes available worldwide - it just needs the concerted effort of both state and private sector to come up with a plan which would work for the UK.

Bernadette Bowles
@Paddy Arkwright Such places do exist in the UK, but are quite expensive. But few offer the kind of rehabilitative care that is needed for many elderly who are sufficiently recovered to leave the main hospital but not yet well enough to cope at home; sometimes families can do this so the person can return home, but if they don't live close by or are themselves not physically up to the task, there is often not the convalescent care that's needed.

Certainly residents of such places are likely to get the help they need to avoid some hospital admissions, but then so do those who can afford to pay for it outside retirement villages. It's the help denied to those who or whose families cannot afford to pay for what the council will not that end up in hospital for preventable problems.

Health and social care should not be seen as two different entities.

Appeasementisfatal
I think health service in our country has been allowed to become a political points scoring and not the economic implications of it. Wastage and vested interests have been allowed to prevail. Business interests and social care have got mixed up and despite record monies have been allocated and spent on NHS the service to patients has become deplorable.
New and radical thinking is needed.

Ricky Freeman
NHS budget guaranteed. Social care budget cut to pay for it. NHS forced to pay towards social care budget. They are not fooling anyone. Admit it, we need to make people pay for the NHS at the point of use, people do not value that which they get for nothing.

glyn owen
They should have been doing this for years.

Newminster
This is all about money.
The NHS is not adequately funded; the Local Authorities are not adequately funded (though if they dipped into their reserves and stopped paying Chief Executives more than the Prime Minister they might be a bit better placed to cope). Health care in Britain is a mess.
One problem is that anything you want to do to your body — have a baby when you can't or get rid of an unborn baby you don't want, have your breasts made bigger/smaller, get rid of the tattoos you incautiously acquired after that drunken night out, get emergency treatment after that drunken night out — the NHS can provide for. Free!
There is not presently enough money to do all these things and to look after the frail elderly or (as Richard Kelly points out below) even the "frail" young. Either increase the amount of money for health care by at least four per cent of GDP or introduce some form of health insurance system to ease the pressure.
(To raise some of the extra money government could always try abandoning some of the Cameronian virtue signalling projects, like 0.7% of GDP to foreign aid or HS2 or Miliband's extremely
expensive — especially for those frail elderly — and totally pointless Climate Change Act.)
It really is time Britain took a grown-up approach to health. You can only have what you want if you are prepared to pay for it and as long as all political parties are too scared to bite that bullet because the opposition (i.e. those same political parties with a different hat on) will immediately set up a hypocritical hue and cry then health care will not improve.
Interesting that with the exception of the USA which is just starting to get to grips with a universal health care system, Britain is the only country where the health of its people is a political football.
A look at outcomes in the rest of Europe ought to concentrate the mind but probably won't

Christopher Spackman @Newminster The NHS could find billions and I mean billions if it didn't treat drunks, people abusing it and the utter waste from within.

A few weeks back at a pre-natal scan staff were looking for a folder to put notes in. She muttered that they cost £4 a pop, you could buy one for less than a pound.

The NHS is very well funded but I do agree that some form of insurance should be introduced but those that do pay it should have their NI contributions reduced as a result.

Ralph Naderbolismattu The NHS is over funded, over 70% of funding goes on wages and managers and doctors should revive substantial pay cuts to balance the books.
David Kent
Transfer the care budget to the NHS need create an integrated service

colin jewitt
@David Kent Result ` -Even more useless staff= non-medical and overpaid.

Richard kelly
I understand why the NHS would go down this route but as a society we are just put sticking plasters on a problem that affects both physical and mental health provision. We have known for years that only an end to end pathway of care will lead to a balanced and cost effective health environment. It is not only getting older people out of hospital it is also an issue of stopping them being admitted in the first place- provision of prevention services, early intervention etc have all been the province of local authority funding, much of which has been decimated in the past 5 years. In my own sphere of mental health it is arguably worse - with no community based services, no investment in children mental health, we are watching a a horror story untold. This paper has already highlighted the plight of people looking for residential mental health placements - it will get worse. More worryingly, every young person who does not get good mental health support and perhaps misses out on the opportunity to achieve in our education system represents a possible lifetime on low incomes, benefits and under achievement. What a waste of our biggest asset - energetic and skilled youth.

E Post
Seems to me that the NHS is merely reinventing the wheel. NHS leased care homes used to be called geriatric hospitals, Community Hospitals, Extra Care homes.... These kind of press release reports
are just a smoke screen that is ignoring the fact that throughout the accountability, responsibility and duty of care for these so-called bed-blockers has always rested with the NHS. It is the delays and incompetence within the NHS Continuing Healthcare processes and the NHS failure to fund complex care that is at the heart of the situation.

DamienT
Very sensible solution.

Jenesaisquoi
Some of these new homes sound like the old convalescent homes of old. Places where you could get better and readjust to going home. They seemed to disappear a few decades ago, which seemed stupid. Some countries never got rid of them, but I think we did. This seems a sensible move. Hospitals are for ill people, not those hopefully on the mend.
Another upside would be a more positive atmosphere with staff having the time to tune into their convalescent patients needs better and give them the best opportunity for a successful return.

Steve Hill
All local council care homes should immediately be transferred to the NHS. Only then will any sort of joined-up thinking begin to take place.

Blackbird

@Steve Hill
Most councils got rid of their care homes when, over time, they were forced to face up to the fact that private homes were providing a better service for about one third less price.

When they became dependent on the private sector they used their (almost) monopoly purchasing powers (proper word: monopsony) to drive down the cost of the care they were buying to the point of bankrupting home owners. Thus this country is faced with the problem it now has - not enough homes.

Papers were presented to government as far back as the mid 90's explaining what this would lead to but, as was expected, they were ignored. However you are absolutely right in that all forms of health and high dependency social care should come under the overall control of the most obvious body, the NHS.

Unfortunately there will be those idiots who will scream 'NHS privatisation' as soon as the NHS becomes seen to contract with private home owners, but that's just a bridge that will have to be crossed should we ever come to it.

Yersinia Pestis
Someone made a suggestion the other day I thought quite sound - all care should be organised and funded by the NHS - as it would stop the perpetual buck passing and arguments with councils over who paid for what. As it is we have on one hand the NHS trying to get people out of hospital and on the other the councils trying their best not to get people into council funded care.

Patrick Gage
I have often thought hospitals should have a 'transition wing' where patients might remain for a few days before being sent home. Staff it with volunteers and the patients themselves. It is a
bit strange to think of a person lying in a hospital bed, surrounded by extremely expensive equipment, tended to by equally expensive skilled staff, and then expected to leave and cope by themselves at home.

Andrew Daws
I've had an idea. If we need more care staff, why not import workers from poorer countries who would be glad to do the work that Brits won't? And let's do everything we san to increase available tax income by working together with our continental neighbours. Or don't we have a "mandate" for sensible options?

Yersinia Pestis
@Andrew Daws
If we need more care staff, why not import workers from poorer countries who would be glad to do the work that Brits won't? We may well do - if we choose to, not because we have no option.

Christopher Spackman
£3bn a year on drunks, endless amounts on fat people, abuse and poor buying. Meanwhile we have one of the worst cancer survival rates in Europe, A&E units are closing down and there aren't enough beds.

'Our NHS'.

Mr Om Gupta 9 hours ago
The hospitals can send the people to private nursing homes which would cost much less than building their own nursing homes and maintaining them.
It has been tried before by the councils to own their care homes and since it was proved too expensive to maintain, most of the councils closed down their care homes.

Why to revisit the same scenario which has been proved financially unsustainable.

Must we waste public money on the experiment which we know failed in the past.

Kevin Alder
"Getting people out of hospital more quickly and back living at home will only work properly if councils get enough resource to properly fund adult social care"

But if the NHS can find a way towards taking continuous responsibility for the care of their most vulnerable patients, whose lives very often consist of repeated ambulance rides between home and hospital ward, then maybe that's a better way forward than competing with councils over funding levels.

Ellipse
Tories fault for slashing social care for the elderly. Simple as that. Now St Theresa will say "They asked for so much. We gave them that amount. What's the problem?" The problem is as stated. Social care slashed.

Chris Huckle
Tories fault, simple as that you say? Nothing to do with a 33% increase in those over 85 in past decade? The ageing
demographic, obesity epidemic and suchlike are above simplistic political posturing like yours. Society has some tough choices to make, and soon.

Christopher Spackman
@Chris Huckle @Ellipse The NHS could find billions and I mean billions if it didn't treat drunks, people abusing it and the utter waste from within.

A few weeks back at a pre-natal scan staff were looking for a folder to put notes in. She muttered that they cost £4 a pop, you could buy one for less than a pound.

The NHS is very well funded.

Yersinia Pestis
@Christopher Spackman
An acquaintance was working in purchasing in the NHS and he told me he had to pay £16 for something he could have bought in town for 99p. - because the deal was done, he had to use a certain supplier.