

Hundreds of seriously ill patients discharged too early

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Hundreds of patients last year were discharged from intensive care and high dependency units too early, and a lack of resources are to blame.

An audit into critical care in Scotland analysed outcomes for people released from ICUs and HDUs in 2016, including those who were readmitted within 48 hours, their discharge having been deemed a mistake.

According to the figures, 438 were discharged prematurely from HDUs, as well as 298 from ICUs.

The total figure represents around two per cent of all discharges from ICUs, and 1.4 per cent from HDUs, the official report by NHS Scotland concluded.

It stated: *“High rates of early discharges are a concern as they reflect a discharge that is felt by the clinical team not to be in the patient’s best interest. This is due to underlying pressure of beds or staff reflecting a lack of available resource.”*

The report showed a variation in performance across the country.

46,000 patient episodes were recorded in critical care units last year.

Aside from those discharged too early, auditors found nearly a quarter of those patients were actually delayed – for at least four hours – in their discharge.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Miles Briggs said:

“While it is only a small percentage of those who are discharged too early, it still represents hundreds of patients.

“The report is stark in its admission that these patients are not being discharged early because of clinical error, but due to a lack of resources and staffing.

“This is yet another indication that poor stewardship of the NHS by the SNP government is having a very real impact on patient safety.

“When dealing with tens of thousands of admissions to critical care units,

it's obvious some people will end up having mistimed discharges.

"But for several hundred of these to occur is unacceptable, and the reasons set out in the report worse still.

"Ministers need to get a grip of this situation as a matter of urgency."

Notes to editors:

The full report is here:

<http://www.sicsag.scot.nhs.uk/docs/2017/2017-08-08-SICSAG-Report.pdf?22>

It states there were 14,908 ICU patient episodes, and 31,297 HDU episodes.

Of the ICU episodes, the report stated two per cent of these resulted in "early" discharges, equating to 298 people.

Of the HDU episodes, 1.4 resulted in "early" discharges, equating to 438 people.