

Tens of thousands of 'adverse events' in Scotland's dementia and geriatric wards

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Dozens of "adverse events" are recorded every day in the dementia and geriatric wards of Scotland's hospitals, new figures have shown.

A Freedom of Information request revealed 167,041 such incidents have occurred in the past six years as an under pressure health service attempts to deal with an ageing population.

The Scottish Conservatives said the data illustrates problems many vulnerable patients have encountered, as well as the daily challenges facing staff in elderly inpatient wards.

Incidents range from falls and assaults on staff to self-harm and patients absconding from secure facilities.

In NHS Borders, one staff member was injured while receiving training in dealing with aggressive patients, and in Fife there were reports of bomb threats and suspicious packages, as well as "rooftop protests".

Much more seriously, bosses at NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde said adverse events had resulted in the deaths of 49 patients since 2011.

In some cases, staff shortages were posing such a risk that employees formally logged that as an adverse event in itself, while in the Western Isles a lack of staff was blamed directly for allowing a patient to climb out a window and escape from hospital.

Shadow health secretary Donald Cameron warned these problems would become more commonplace as Scotland's population aged, and cases of dementia increased.

The true figure is likely to be even higher, as some health boards were unable to provide the information, or supplied only the most serious of events.

Last year, it was revealed that maternity units across Scotland had also endured thousands of adverse events, prompting calls for an investigation.

Scottish Conservative shadow health secretary Donald Cameron said:

“Patients in dementia and geriatric wards are among the most vulnerable in our hospitals, and deserve the best possible care.

“And there’s no question that wards dealing with dementia patients are incredibly challenging places to work: many of these incidents illustrate that.

“In such environments many of these adverse incidents will have been unavoidable, and it’s a credit to hardworking NHS staff that they deal with these day, in day out.

“But patients in these wards, and their families, will be extremely worried at the sheer scale of these flashpoints.

“There are a significant number of incidents which were put down to staffing shortages, or a lack of adequate resources and training, and that very much falls at the Scottish Government’s door.

“As our population ages and conditions like dementia become more prevalent, it’s clear something needs to be done to ensure these incidents don’t increase.

“We need to see a proper plan to make sure our staff and hospitals are equipped for all the future challenges they face.”

Below is a list of the adverse events recorded by health boards for the past six years:

Ayrshire and Arran – 15,043
Borders – 10,252
Dumfries and Galloway – 6399
Fife – 19,308
Forth Valley – 13,629
Greater Glasgow and Clyde – 270
Grampian – 16,426
Highland – 7073
Lanarkshire – 33,092
Lothian – 44,890
Orkney – n/a
Shetland – n/a
Tayside – no response
Western Isles – 659

Total – 167,041

Below is a list of the national figures broken down by year:

2011 – 28,239
2012 – 28,659

2013 – 28,317
2014 – 29,847
2015 – 28,906
2016 – 23,118*

Total – 167,041

**Some health boards only supplied information for part of 2016, which may explain the lower number.*

All details were obtained by the Scottish Conservatives through Freedom of Information. For a copy of individual responses, contact the Scottish Conservative press office.

Last year, it was revealed that thousands of adverse events had occurred in maternity units across the country:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-38055060>