

Low pay ‘no excuse for poor care of elderly patients’

Low wages and poor staffing levels are no excuse for failing to treat elderly patients with dignity.

The neglect of vulnerable patients in hospitals and nursing homes should not be dismissed as isolated incidents, according to Sir Keith Pearson, head of NHS Confederation.

Sir Pearson called for a fundamental change in the culture of the health service before it is overwhelmed by the burden of an ageing population.

Addressing the annual conference of the Royal College of Nursing in Harrogate, Sir Keith said he accepts that no nurse comes into the NHS with the intention of delivering poor care, but that unacceptable episodes are cropping up too often.

He conceded that there is no excuse for “inappropriate staffing levels” and sympathised with nurses and care staff who work long hours for low pay. But he insisted that this does not absolve them from accepting responsibility for neglect when it is taking place on their ward or in their care home.

It is clear the NHS and care home staffs are facing challenges that previous generations have not experienced. Two thirds of patients are likely now to be over the age of 65: a third of those will have dementia, and many will also suffer from multiple long-term conditions from which they will not recover. The workforce must adapt to this shift from curative to palliative care.

A Commission on improving dignity for older people its interim report, published this year, urged employers to encourage staff to blow the whistle on instances of neglect and abuse.

We note said Chris Berry from the cases coming into our offices that there is a significant rise in concerns being expressed by relatives of patients as to the level of care being provided. In many of the cases we investigate there is a worrying degree of neglect. By relatives taking action for damages suffered this is bringing some pressure to bear on management, in what seems the only way they recognise by hitting their pockets. Failure to provide caring and satisfactory levels of service to those vulnerable members of society cannot be allowed to continue.