

The Rt Hon Sajid Javid MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care
39 Victoria Street
London
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17 November 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

An open letter regarding hospital discharge

We are writing to share a series of stories published through the [British Geriatrics Society's Timely Discharge campaign](#). These stories will tell you of the heartbreaking situations that individuals, families, clinicians and providers up and down the country find themselves in. We share these with you in the hope that they will prompt you to act swiftly to address the critical shortage of skilled professionals in domiciliary care and care homes.

We start with the story of Emily who had Alzheimer's disease and was cared for by Lammy, her husband of 52 years. Emily fractured her hip after a fall and had surgery which left her confused and unable to walk. She was moved to a community hospital, ostensibly for rehabilitation but in reality because there was no care package or rehab available for her at home. In yet another unfamiliar setting, Emily became more disoriented and constantly asked for Lammy and asked to go home. Days turned into weeks and it became clear that Emily would never walk again. While Emily and Lammy waited in vain for a care package to allow Emily to return home, Emily's condition deteriorated and she died. Emily never went home. Lammy died of 'Broken heart' syndrome the following week.

We could tell the same desperate story from different angles. We could tell you about Katie, the NHS Manager responsible for complex discharges, whose team constantly feels like they are failing their patients because there are not enough carers to allow them to go home when they should. We could tell you about Graham, the owner of a home care company who can't get the staff to provide much needed care. We could tell you about the organisations representing care providers and clinicians who hear stories every day from their frustrated members who are not able to provide the good quality care that they want to. The stories all point to one fundamental cause: a massive shortfall of care staff.

As we write, winter is fast approaching and the NHS is under extreme pressure. The COVID-19 pandemic has delivered the most challenging circumstances that NHS staff have faced during their careers. NHS staff are burnt out and exhausted and facing another winter of caring for COVID patients as well as trying to catch up with the backlog of patients whose treatment has been delayed during the pandemic.

This would be challenging enough without hospital wards full of people like Emily who do not need to be there. We know that in acute hospitals up and down the country, there are still far too many people who are ready for discharge but unable to leave because the care and rehab they need at home is not available. Thousands more, like Emily, have been moved to community hospitals or care homes, officially for ongoing assessment but in reality because they cannot get the care they need at home. And like Emily, many will never return home.

We call on you to put in place the measures called for by provider representative organisations such as the National Care Forum and Care England. These measures

include a retention bonus for care staff, a pay increase for social care staff, and temporarily adding care staff to the Shortage Occupation List. These are short-term measures that will help to relieve the pressure over the coming months. In the longer term we call on you to develop a strategy and sustainable plan for the recruitment, retention and support of the health and social care workforce providing care for older people.

The crisis in social care has always impacted upon the NHS and the perfect storm of winter, COVID and Brexit means that the workforce situation is now untenable. This Government must act on its promises to fix social care, both in the short term to relieve pressure on the NHS and provide care to those who need it now and over the next few months and in the long term, to ensure that the system is sustainable for the future. Older people should not have to wait any longer.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jennifer Burns
President

Caroline Abrahams CBE
Charity Director

Deborah Alsina MBE
Chief Executive

British Geriatrics Society
Improving healthcare
for older people



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