

EMBARGOED until 0:00 Friday 16 December 2011

LOGOS

Billion pounds wasted while patients continue to suffer

Leading charities demand end to unnecessary emergency hospital admissions and call on Government to invest in quality, not pay for failure

Almost £1billion of pounds have been wasted by the Department of Health through people with neurological conditions being unnecessarily admitted to hospital, a report published today by the National Audit Office exposes.

Leading charities - MS Society, Motor Neurone Disease (MND) Association, Parkinson's UK and the Neurological Alliance, along with non-profit organisation Neurological Commissioning Support – are urging the Government to create a targeted and properly resourced national strategy for neurological conditions. The report recommends any strategy needs to deliver value for the public purse and improve outcomes for people with these conditions.

The report focuses on services provided for people diagnosed with motor neurone disease (MND), multiple sclerosis (MS) and Parkinson's. Between 2006-07 and 2009-10 there has been a 38 per cent increase in spending on neurological health services (excluding neurological pain). This reflects a spend of £2.9 billion in 2009-10 compared to £2.1 billion in 2006-07. However, the quality of care has worsened and the Department of Health have admitted they have no understanding of how this extra money has benefited patients.

Despite the increased funding, the report demonstrates that there are still significant problems with services, including long delays in receiving a diagnosis, lack of access to information and care that is fragmented and poorly coordinated.

The report reveals this poor care has resulted in unnecessary and expensive emergency hospital admissions. Between 2004-05 and 2009-10 emergency admissions to hospital had increased by 32 per cent for neurological patients, compared to 17 per cent for the NHS as a whole. As well as putting a significant strain on the NHS, this has a severe impact on the well-being of patients and their families.

This exposes what the charities have known for some time, services are simply not up to scratch and the NHS has been paying for the cost of failure for years.

Farah Nazeer, Director of External Affairs at the MND Association said: "Today's damning report highlights how money alone cannot improve patient care. The increase in emergency admissions is costing the NHS greatly. It is also costing the lives of people with MND who are spending what little time they have left in hospital, often against their wishes.

"We know that the monthly cost of caring for someone with motor neurone disease is £16,000, when you factor in costly emergency admissions to hospital then this figure can triple. We are sitting on a neurological time bomb and we need urgent national action now."

Simon Gillespie, Chief Executive of the MS Society said: "Every time a person is admitted to A&E because of their MS, the health and social care system has failed. When people with MS are properly supported in managing their condition, there should be no reason for unplanned admissions, which cost both patients and the NHS dearly.

"MS specialist nurses play a critical role in providing this support and coordinating care, but with one MS nurse to every 454 people, these posts are sadly rare and many are at threat due to short-sighted budget cuts.

"This report is a stark warning that today's patchy services and poor planning in health and social care can leave us counting the financial and human costs for years to come."

Steve Ford, Chief Executive of Parkinson's UK said: "The National Audit Office report exposes a wasteful failure to provide vital care for people with neurological conditions.

"Being admitted into hospital unnecessarily can cause problems for people with Parkinson's because they often do not get their medication on time. Late or missed medication can make their symptoms unmanageable so they have to stay in hospital longer and in sometimes they may never recover. The report also confirms that people are being discharged from hospital before they are ready. This serves to

benefit hospitals financially, but creates a cycle of 'referral-discharge-referral' for people with long term conditions, such as Parkinson's.

"Admissions and readmissions could be reduced by giving every person with Parkinson's access to a specialist nurse and it would save the NHS up to £42 million. The government needs to act now to provide the care people with these devastating conditions need."

Ends

For further information please contact:

Mel Barry 01604 611887 or 07760765143 mel.barry@mndassociation.org

See appendix A for case study examples (all are willing to be interviewed/featured in the media).

About MS Society

The MS Society is the UK's largest charity dedicated to supporting everyone whose life is touched by multiple sclerosis (MS), funding around 70 vital research projects, providing an award-winning free phone helpline (0808 800 8000), investing in MS specialists and giving grants.

An estimated 100,000 people have MS in the UK however there's currently no cure and few effective treatments available.

- MS is the most common neurological condition affecting young adults
- Fifty people are diagnosed each week
- MS is the result of damage to myelin- a protective sheath surrounding nerve fibres of the central nervous system
- Symptoms range from loss of sight and mobility, fatigue, depression and cognitive problems

About Parkinson's UK

Every hour, someone in the UK is told they have Parkinson's. Because we're here, no one has to face Parkinson's alone.

We bring people with Parkinson's, their carers and families together via our network of local groups, our website and free confidential helpline. Specialist nurses, our supporters and staff provide information and training on every aspect of Parkinson's.

As the UK's Parkinson's support and research charity we're leading the work to find a cure, and we're closer than ever. We also campaign to change attitudes and demand better services.

Our work is totally dependent on donations. Help us to find a cure and improve life for everyone affected by Parkinson's.

About MND

MND is a rapidly progressive and fatal disease. It can affect any adult at any time and attacks the motor neurones that send messages from the brain to the muscles, leaving people unable to walk, talk, eat or breathe. The cause of the disease is unknown and there is no known cure. Around 5,000 people in the UK have MND at any one time, with half dying within 14 months of diagnosis.

Maximum direct costs to the health and social services for a person with MND is approximately £200,000 annually, and represents a maximum cost to health and social services in UK of £373 million a year in addition to indirect costs to the economy of approximately £1.1 billion.

The Motor Neurone Disease (MND) Association is the only national organisation in England, Wales and Northern Ireland dedicated to the support of people with MND and those who care for them. The Association funds and promotes research to understand what causes MND, how to diagnose it and, most importantly, how to effectively treat it so that it no longer devastates lives.

About Neurological Commissioning Support Ltd (NCS)

Neurological Commissioning Support Ltd (NCS) is a not-for-profit, voluntary sector organisation that aims to secure better care and services for people living with a long-term neurological condition. How? By putting service users at the heart of neurology commissioning. NCS was set up by the MS Society, Motor Neurone Disease (MND) Association and Parkinson's UK. Epilepsy Society has been an affiliate partner since 2011.

About the Neurological Alliance

The Neurological Alliance is the only collective voice for more than 70 national and regional brain and spine organisations working together to make life better for 8 million children, young people and adults in England with a neurological condition. The Neurological Alliance raises awareness and understanding of neurological conditions to ensure that every person diagnosed with a neurological condition has access to high quality, joined up services and information from their first symptoms and throughout their life.