

OLD GREY MATTER ARTICLE

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Social Care Provision for the Elderly

The December bulletin, 'Campaign', of the National Pensioners Convention (NPC) highlights issues of importance to senior citizens and can be seen on the website at: www.npcuk.org Most serious was a glaring omission from the Chancellor's Autumn Statement on the subject of future funding of social care. A golden opportunity to re-frame NHS and Social Care provision has been missed, seemingly totally ignored, to the detriment of millions of elderly in this country, and others who need to get NHS treatment in acute hospitals that are frustrated by not being able to send elderly patients home or into care due to lack of social care facilities and infrastructure. In former years, such patients used to go into their local area cottage hospitals such as at Southwold and Halesworth but they are not now available. Lowestoft hospital, now completely closed, is a classic example of austerity cuts leading to the present situation. One wonders what will become of the considerable estate of buildings and land of the redundant hospital. Surely some sort of investment ought to be made into the Social care framework in this area to serve the local elderly population, increase the residential care capacity, and assist the district care and nursing teams. In the weeks leading up to the statement, various health organisations, charities, think tanks and campaign groups had been calling on the government to close the funding gap. Since 2010, social care budgets have been cut by around £5bn and experts say that next year there will be a £1.9bn shortfall which will increase to £2.3bn by 2019/20.

It is well documented that the system suffers from a postcode lottery of charges, limited access to services, badly paid and poorly trained staff, a lack of proper regulation, low standards, inadequate "flying" 15-minute visits and a lack of dignity for both staff and residents. As a result of the cuts to funding, well over 1m older people no longer get the help and support they need in their own home and so are more prone to seek GP or acute hospital services. NPC's women's group had several reports at the Pensioners Parliament in June that loneliness and isolation have an impact on health and well-being so an emphasis on independent living alone may be misguided and community life should be stressed more. This is all the more reason for a good all-embracing social care service with home visits for all who need them

Dot Gibson, NPC general secretary said: "Everyone knows there is a real crisis in social care, but the Chancellor didn't even mention it. Yet the general public know that more of the same just won't work. We need a new approach to social care that makes it part of the NHS and funds it through taxation."

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