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End of the ward? NHS boss says single rooms should be norm in post-Covid hospitals

National medical director says separating patients would offer 'privacy and dignity' as well as supporting infection control

By Lizzie Roberts, HEALTH REPORTER

19 October 2021 • 7:35pm



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Single rooms should become the "default" in hospitals, NHS England's medical director has said, signalling an end to multi-patient wards.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/10/19/end-hospital-ward-nhs-boss-says-single-rooms-should-post-covid/>

Prof Stephen Powis, NHS England's national medical director, told the health and social care committee that private rooms would offer "privacy and dignity" for patients. He said they would also support infection control and reduce the spread of respiratory diseases post-pandemic.

It is estimated that thousands of patients [caught Covid while in hospital](#), raising concerns over infection control measures and the quality of ventilation in some NHS buildings.

One study showed that [up to 11,800 people caught the virus](#) in hospitals during the first wave in 2020.

Infections originating in a hospital *Symptoms onset 14 days+ after admission*

7-day rolling %



SOURCE: NERVTAG (APRIL 1)

Historically, large hospital wards were made up of around 30 beds – but modern wards typically include around six.

Mr Powis told the committee: "I feel that, coming out of the pandemic, one of things we really need to think hard about is the number of single beds that we have.



"And I think that we need to move in our hospitals much more to single rooms being the default for privacy and dignity, for infection control, and actually for flow issues... that is something we need to think hard about as we build the hospitals of the future."

Two-thirds of patients prefer single rooms

It is believed to be the first time NHS England has called for the single bed model to be default.

In Scotland, Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary and the Glasgow Southern General were built as single bed wards, while Tunbridge Wells Hospital, which opened in 2011, was the first NHS hospital in England to be built with single inpatient rooms across all wards.

It comes after the Government announced last year that [40 hospitals would be built by 2030](#) as part of a package worth £3.7 billion. NHS Providers, which represents hospital trusts, said the plan would cost an additional £17 billion. It is also unclear whether single bed rooms

would be the preferred model for the new hospitals.

Research published in the BMJ found that two-thirds of patients preferred single rooms, with factors including comfort and control outweighing any disadvantages.

But the set-up proved worse for staff, according to a study at Tunbridge Wells. Staff found "single rooms worse for visibility, surveillance, teamwork, monitoring and keeping patients safe", it said, recommending that any hospitals planning a move to single beds should "encourage staff to prepare and rehearse".

‘We have an overwhelming and huge backlog’

Separately, Amanda Pritchard, the NHS chief executive, told the committee the health service had not been overwhelmed because of Covid, sparking a Twitter backlash.

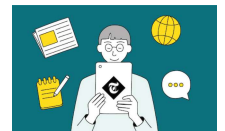
She said she was proud of the NHS and the "way that critical care services were stood up and expanded, the speed of new treatments like dexamethasone, the roll-out of the vaccine programme – all of which meant the NHS was not overwhelmed".

Prof Pat Price, the founder of the Catch Up With Cancer campaign, said the comments were "really jarring and intensely disappointing to hear", adding: "The entire cancer pathway was disrupted during the pandemic.

"Yes, frontline staff moved heaven and earth to keep going, but we have an overwhelming and huge backlog. We keep hearing this message that 'everything is ok', but the truth is that this is the biggest cancer crisis in our lifetime."

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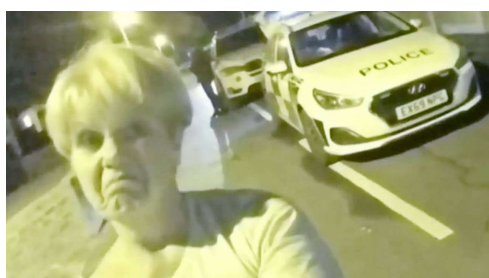
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