

Four patients die thirsty or starving EVERY DAY on our hospital wards show damning new statistics

- Data shows 1,316 deaths were linked to or directly caused by dehydration and malnutrition in 2010
- Figures are far higher than in 2000, when 862 deaths were recorded
- One hospital forced to prescribe drinking water for its patients

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Four patients are dying hungry and thirsty on hospital wards every day, shocking figures reveal.

Dehydration or malnutrition directly caused or was linked to 1,316 deaths last year in NHS trusts and privately run hospitals.

The revelation follows a series of damning reports accusing staff of failing to address the most basic needs of the vulnerable, particularly the elderly.



Shocking: Figures have shown that four people a day are dying on Britain's

hospital wards thanks to either malnutrition or dehydration, with the elderly seen as the most vulnerable

Only this month David Cameron was forced to order nurses to carry out hourly spot checks of patients just to see whether they need help eating, drinking or going to the toilet.

And in some hospitals doctors have been forced to prescribe patients with drinking water or put them on drips to make sure they do not become severely dehydrated.

Figures obtained by the Daily Mail from the Office for National Statistics show that in 2010, the most recent data, 155 patients died in hospital from dehydration while a further 48 died from malnutrition.



Orders: David Cameron was forced to tell nurses to carry out hourly checks on patients earlier this month to ensure patients were being properly looked after

A further 812 patients died with dehydration and another 301 with malnutrition,

although the conditions did not directly cause their death.

Officials who compiled the figures pointed out that not all deaths could be directly blamed on poor care. Some illnesses such as Alzheimer's or certain forms of cancer make it very difficult for patients to eat or drink.

But campaigners said that no one in this day and age should be dying hungry or thirsty in hospital, regardless of the circumstances.

Katherine Murphy, chief executive of the Patients Association, said: 'These figures are a terrible indictment of our precious National Health Service.

'They represent avoidable deaths. These people needed our care when they were at their most vulnerable.'

Michelle Mitchell, charity director at Age UK, said: 'There must be systematic monitoring of malnutrition in older patients. From the hospital ward to the hospital board, everyone needs to take responsibility and help stop this scandal.'

The ONS provided figures for the number of deaths in both NHS and privately run hospitals where malnutrition and dehydration was reported as a 'direct cause' or a 'contributory factor'.

They show that they are far higher compared to a decade ago; only 862 such deaths were recorded in 2000.

The latest figures are slightly up on the previous year when there were 1,292 such deaths. But when the numbers of deaths per patients in hospital is taken into account, the figures for the two years are broadly similar.

'MY MUM NEEDED HELP BUT SHE DIDN'T GET IT'



'Desperately thirsty': Anne Robson, 79

NURSES refused to put 79-year-old Anne Robson on a drip or give her help drinking, claiming she was 'capable' of doing it for herself.

The widow, a former school governor and Red Cross fundraiser, was admitted to West Suffolk Hospital after falling out of bed at her care home.

Her daughter Liz Pryor, 46, said that when she visited, her mother seemed confused, lethargic and 'desperately thirsty'. Her hands were so weak she could not properly grip. Mrs Pryor had brought her mother some ginger beer and she immediately drank two full glasses through a straw.

Although nurses claimed she was 'capable', Mrs Pryor said: 'We knew this was not the case. She needed help and she wasn't getting it.'

On another occasion she left a card and a bag of 'goodies' next to her mother's bed - but nurses forgot to give them to her. 'It breaks my heart that Mum never got the chance to read it before she died,' said Mrs Pryor.

Mrs Robson died from heart failure a few weeks after being admitted to the hospital in early 2010.

Early this month Mr Cameron announced that nurses would have to undertake hourly ward rounds to check whether patients are hungry or thirsty, need help going to the lavatory or are in pain or discomfort.

And last year similar guidance was issued by the General Medical Council reminding doctors that care does not begin and end with clinical treatment

Reports by the Care Quality Commission, the Health Service Ombudsman and the Patients Association have all highlighted poor care. In October, a review by the CQC watchdog found that half of 100 hospitals visited by its inspectors were not doing enough to ensure elderly patients had enough to eat or drink.

In Alexandra Hospital in Redditch, Worcestershire, doctors had resorted to prescribing patients with drinking water to ensure nurses did not forget



Last resort: Doctors at the Alexandra Hospital in Redditch, Worcestershire, had to prescribe drinking water for some patients to ensure that nurses did not forget

In many wards nurses were dumping meal trays in front of patients too weak to feed themselves and then taking them away again untouched.

The Mail has long called for better care of patients in old age as part of our Dignity for the Elderly campaign. Last year we launched a separate appeal with the Patients Association which helped draw ministers' attention to the scale of the neglect.

A Department of Health spokesman said: 'Many patients who suffer or die from malnutrition and dehydration are admitted to hospital with these conditions and have underlying health conditions like cancer that make them more susceptible to these problems. However, every NHS patient has the right to expect that they are looked after properly in hospital.'

The spokesman said action had been taken to ensure nurses would have 'more time to check that patients are comfortable, are helped to eat and drink, and are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve'.