

Leicester Mercury

CARE

FOR THE ELDERLY

C A M P A I G N

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The Leicester Mercury today launches a campaign to ensure all elderly people get the care and respect they deserve from the NHS.

It comes after a national investigation into the care of elderly hospital patients in England found evidence of an "indefensible casual indifference" to their dignity and welfare.

While the vast majority of NHS staff work incredibly hard and do a fantastic job under enormous pressure, there are real questionmarks over the quality of care some patients receive.

We want to find out how widespread the problem is in Leicestershire, and are calling on readers aged 65 and over – or their families – to tell us if they have experienced an unacceptable level of care while in hospital.

To make sure we get the full picture, we would also like to hear from those who have had exceptional care.

The Mercury has reported on several cases in recent months involving problems with elderly people's care while in hospital.

Today, we feature a distressing account of the care an elderly woman received, as told by her daughter, Rosalind Adam.

In it, she says she was "sickened" by the treatment her 88-year-old mother received during a recent stay at Leicester General Hospital.

But campaigners say most people who are unhappy with the care they or a loved one receive in hospital never make a complaint.

Our campaign, called Care for the Elderly, comes after a report last week by health service ombudsman Ann Abraham talked about a deplorable level of NHS care for elderly people nationally.

Leicester West MP and shadow health minister Liz Kendall is backing our campaign.

She said: "Like many MPs, I read the health ombudsman report and was appalled by the cases of the poor treatment of old people in the NHS.

"I know the vast majority of people receive excellent care, but I back the Mercury campaign because we want to hear of cases where elderly people have not been treated with the dignity and respect that they deserve.

"I know old people often do not want to complain or feel like they are making a fuss, but every single old person deserves the very best quality of care. That is why I am backing the Mercury campaign."

In her report, Ms Abraham said a series of failures had been revealed in 10 often "harrowing" complaints she investigated relating to the care of older patients.

While none of the 10 incidents investigated happened in Leicestershire, we know, from the stories we have printed, that it does sometimes happen here.

We will compile the stories you send in to us into a dossier, which we will present to the Department of Health and local NHS officials.

We will be pressing for changes and improvements to ensure every elderly patient – not just the majority – receives the exemplary level of care from the NHS that they deserve.

Sir Peter Soulsby, Leicester South MP, said: "I fully support the Mercury's campaign and what Rosalind is doing to raise awareness of this issue.

"Although much of the NHS is brilliant and the staff wonderful, it's clear from this case and from the recent report of the ombudsman that there is far too often neglect and low standards in the care for the elderly.

"This is something that all members of hospital trusts need to deal with.

"They need to be asking tough questions of their chief executives about how they are looking after the elderly people in their care."

Leicester East MP Keith Vaz said: "Complaints from residents highlight a concerning gap in care for the elderly. Ensuring good quality healthcare for the elderly in our communities is essential.

"I fully support this campaign and will be working with the Leicester Mercury to get this message across to hospitals in Leicester and the Department of Health."

Leicestershire Age Concern chief executive Tony Donovan said he believes improvements have been made in Leicester's hospitals over the past two to three years, but he urged any patients or relatives who had experienced problems to make their voices heard.

Mr Donovan said: "In the last few years, our view is that we are not getting the level of complaints and concerns that we used to.

"However, there will be occasions when the level of support and care people get isn't good enough.

"Our advice is that we would urge anyone in that position to lodge a complaint through the proper channels.

"In doing so, they are hopefully protecting other older people.

"When you go into hospital or long-term care it is intimidating enough as it is, and you just want assurance that you are going to be treated with dignity and respect.

"There are organisations that can help people take a complaint forward, including Age Concern."

Patient watchdog Leicester City local involvement network is also backing our campaign.

Chairman Darren Hines said: "In light of what was said nationally last week, I think this campaign is a very good idea. This is an ongoing situation that needs resolving."

Brian Adams, 72, of Broughton Astley, fought for two years to find out why his 92-year-old mother, Joan, was allowed to suffer unnecessary pain and distress in hospital.

He took his complaints about the University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust to the ombudsman.

He said: "There must be loads of people in the county who have had similar problems, but a lot throw in the towel because they don't think it's worth it."

To share your story, call the Mercury newsdesk on 0116 222 4241, write to Leicester Mercury Elderly Health Campaign, Newsdesk, Leicester Mercury, St George Street, Leicester LE1 9FQ, or e-mail: