

# Geriatric medicine

## A Introduction

People aged over 65 occupy two-thirds of NHS beds. The majority of physicians specialising in geriatric medicine are on take for general medicine as well as being responsible for wards for frail older people.

It is anticipated that older frail people in hospital, because of their frailty, may be more vulnerable to infection and also have a higher case fatality rate. Infection control and isolation in wards for older people will need to be of a higher order because of the dependency of the patients. Hand washing and respiratory hygiene will be essential. This may be challenging because of the shortage of single room accommodation.

Older frail people are more likely to develop secondary complications such as pneumonia and respiratory failure, in some cases requiring ventilation and/or intensive care. They will also take longer to recover from their illness, needing longer hospital stays. This in turn will put pressure on the numbers of beds available for older people as bed numbers have been reduced. Care homes and intermediate care do not have the staffing resources to care for such sick patients.

Geriatricians pride themselves on ensuring that older people are discharged safely to their own homes with sufficient support at home. In the presence of a pandemic flu, discharging older frail patients home will become increasingly difficult as the workforce providing social service support, primary care and care in care homes will be equally affected.

## B Implications

- ▶ Hands-on staff such as nurses, geriatricians and their junior staff will need to be immunised, as well as care home staff and the domiciliary work force.
- ▶ At-risk frail older people will need to be immunised as in the yearly flu immunisation.
- ▶ Closed wards may need to be reopened to cope with the excess work.
- ▶ All doctors will need to work with sick patients and consideration will need to be given to cancelling non-urgent activities such as outpatient appointments.
- ▶ A key geriatrician and lead nurse should be appointed to work closely with hospital management to ensure effective management of the most vulnerable group of patients.

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Joint Specialty Committee for Geriatrics