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Red Cross calls for better social care for the elderly by Adam Stive

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A new study commissioned by the British Red Cross has highlighted huge problems in home based care. The charity is calling for the government to look again at this area and improve social care for the elderly.

The Red Cross is most readily identified with providing care and medical provision in far off countries and war zones, but in fact the organisation provides social care support to over 400,000 people each year in Britain.

The findings are a chilling reminder of what can happen when, in times of austerity, a government has to make huge decisions about public spending. The study finds that elderly people are at the sharp end when it comes to the cuts.

But the Red Cross say the stringent cuts to home care services in particular are a â€˜false economyâ€™ a decent services earlier on with an elderly person can save the NHS as much as Â£10,000 in the long run.

The charity found that there is increasing isolation amongst the elderly, which is leading to more accidents, such as falls, which in turn puts pressure on NHS beds.

The study shows that a staggering nine out of ten GPs thought elderly people were more at risk due to the new wave of cuts. It also asked the general public what they thought, and again there was near unanimity with 85% believing that support is being cut back due to a lack of funding.

Chief Executive of the British Red Cross Sir Nick Young acknowledged that the government where facing tough spending choices but said that under investment in lower-end home based care jeopardises patients, undermines their well being and dignity and must be challenged. He said it is a false economy as the bill to look after patients later on can be much higher, therefore it makes perfect sense to provide care and support earlier. Sir Nick called on the government to rethink its policy in this area.

The Patients Association also backed the Red Cross findings, their CEO Katherine Murphy said there is already evidence of neglect in the system, and relatives are complaining to her that there is now an acute lack of resources in the system, which is down squarely to the coalitionâ€™s cuts.

Commenting on the study the Department of Health agreed that it was a false economy to provide fewer services, but failed to answer the central question of why those very services now seem to be fewer.

The Red Cross study has shone a light on a problem that doesnâ€™t look like it will be fixed any time soon. Ultimately it will be down to the government to decide whether more cash can be found to keep social care for the elderly at acceptable levels. The Red Cross and GPâ€™s certainly think they should. But the study has also emphasised the important role that charities will play in the coming years.

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Adam Stive - About Author:
Ana Nursing - Nursing Home with Palliative Care and End ofÂ Life Care Hospital for the Quality Disabled and Elderly Care -a Palliative Care London , UK - Residential Care Homes service for Dementia,a Live in Care ,Â Residential Nursing and Respite Care Assistants in London, UK. For more information please visit:- http://www.myliveincare.com

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