

LETTERS

AN UNSAFE WARD

Allow relatives to stay overnight with vulnerable adults to make wards more safe for them

Rajat Srivastava *general practitioner*

Abbey Medical Practice, Wellingborough NN8 1LT, UK

Shakespeare's reflections of events around her father's death were heartbreaking—"the whole system ignored him."¹

As a paediatrician in training, I worked on wards where children were admitted overnight. An adult always stayed with them, partly because the children needed an adult near them. However, the family also took the child to the toilet, called the nurse, and so on. Some older people are equally vulnerable—for example, many are confused and have dementia or poor hearing.

More nurses or healthcare assistants will not be employed overnight, and the system will take years to improve.

Shakespeare said, "I wish I'd stayed with him overnight." As far as I know, relatives are allowed only at certain times. Perhaps they should be allowed to stay overnight, so that they have more say in the care their vulnerable relatives receive. The argument against doing this is that there are not enough beds. However, the shortage of "beds" is often due to lack of staff to cover them rather than the physical absence of beds.

My grandmother was recently in hospital in New Delhi with pneumonia and confusion. All the family members took turns to stay overnight with her, and this ensured she was never left alone in a potentially dangerous situation.

I do not wish to deviate from the main problem of staffing levels and compassion, but I strongly believe that this measure could be easily implemented. We look after our relatives at home when they are unwell. Why can we not contribute when they are admitted to hospital?

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1 Shakespeare J. An unsafe ward. *BMJ* 2013;346:f1243. (25 February.)

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