NHS management said elderly would “have to die” in care homes

Robert Stevens and John Stryder
19 May 2020

Devastating evidence has come to light confirming that the Johnson government’s murderous policies have led to the deaths of thousands of care home residents.

Office for National Statistics (ONS) data shows that around 12,000 people have died in the UK’s care homes. The real figure is far higher—at least 20,000 according to the *Financial Times* and the *Times*.

Researchers at the London School of Economics’ (LSE) Care Policy and Evaluation Centre concluded that 22,000 care home residents in England and Wales may have died as a direct or indirect result of COVID-19. The LSE found that ONS data on care home deaths directly attributed to the virus significantly underestimated the impact of the pandemic, accounting for four out of 10 (41.6 percent) of the “excess deaths” in care settings recorded in recent weeks in England and Wales.

It states, “Calculating total excess mortality in care homes since 28 December and adjusting this by the assumption that 15 percent of care home residents die in hospital, suggests that by 1 May there had been in excess of 22,000 deaths of care home residents during the COVID-19 pandemic—54 percent of all excess mortality—in England and Wales.”

The government is desperate to cover-up the scale of its crimes.

Last Friday, Health Secretary Matt Hancock declared that the government had “tried to throw a protective ring around” care homes “right from the start” of the outbreak.

In truth, the government turned the UK’s 20,000 care homes—housing over 400,000 elderly and vulnerable people—into killing fields.

Among the most heinous crimes of the Tories was the directive from NHS England in March to clear thousands of people out of hospital beds, with many sent to their death beds in care homes. The NHS, de-staffed and brought to its knees by tens of billions in budget cuts over the previous decades, feared that it would be unable to cope with an influx of coronavirus patients. In a bid to ensure there would be no photos and footage of COVID-19 patients dying in hospital corridors, as in Italy, thousands of elderly people were booted out of hospital, many without even being tested to see if they were infected.

In a letter to the *Sunday Times* this week, the owner of a private care home “providing 500 beds in the southwest of England” revealed, “On March 17, Sir Simon Stevens, the NHS chief executive, said hospitals had to get 90,000 beds cleared, so they needed to get 30,000 people out. So, they sent patients with no tests into care homes. They said: We don’t need tests—you’ve just got to take them.”

The letter from Stevens to all NHS hospitals demanded they “Urgently discharge all hospital in patients who are medically fit to leave.”

The owner added, “Well, I’ve now got two homes with COVID-19. We can trace it. In both homes, it came from residents bringing the virus from hospital. So, when the manager of another of my homes rang to tell me he’d refused, I said categorically, ‘Well done.’ That home has 90 beds, and to this day it is still COVID-free.”

He continued, “The government is boasting how it did so well in protecting the NHS, but the reality is deaths in care homes.”

Hospitals were also declared out of bounds for residents of care homes who needed vital medical attention—with the result being social murder on an industrial scale. The care home owner commented, “We were sent a public health document on March 13, which said that if any of our residents got significantly ill, they wouldn’t be allowed into hospital and would have to die in their home. We’d never read anything like it.”

Many on social media are critical of the government’s lies and propaganda. Opposing the claims of Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster Michael Gove on Sunday on the BBC’s *Andrew Marr Show* that care homes had been

© World Socialist Web Site

adequately protected during the pandemic, one doctor tweeted, “I don’t often tweet politics but watching @michaelgove on #Marr, I have to say this: The care homes I look after DID have COVID-positive residents discharged from hospitals. The staff DID NOT have adequate PPE [personal protective equipment]. Other residents caught COVID and DIED in HIGHER NUMBERS as a result.”

Last month, it was reported that Britain’s Chief Scientific Adviser, Sir Patrick Vallance, along with other senior scientists, had warned politicians “very early on” about the risk COVID-19 posed to care homes. The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) have been advising the government twice weekly since the first coronavirus meeting on January 22.

According to reports, Vallance had “flagged” the risk of care home and hospital outbreaks at the start of the epidemic. While the government launched its cynical “protect the NHS” campaign, under conditions in which front-line nurses were having to combat a deadly virus with inadequate or no PPE, nursing homes were left to their fate.

As recently as March 12, the only government advice on care home residents—dating back to February 25—was, “it remains very unlikely that people receiving care in a care home will become infected.”

This guidance remained in place until March 13, more than a week after the Chief Medical Officer, Sir Chris Whitty, confirmed publicly that it was “highly likely” community transmission had started and that organisations should proceed on this assumption. However, the guidance continued to say that cases in care homes were “very unlikely” for eight days after there was known community transmission.

Due to the government’s “herd immunity” strategy, the disease ran rampant throughout the population in January, February and for further weeks into March. Last week, results from a study by researchers at Cambridge University—based on a survey at the city’s Addenbrooke’s Hospital—found that thousands of nurses, doctors and healthcare workers could be carrying COVID-19 without realising they have been infected and that they may, in many cases, show no symptoms.

On April 2, the Department of Health issued separate guidance that negative tests for coronavirus were “not required” before discharging people from hospital into a care home. The document was signed jointly by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), the NHS and Public Health England.

The CQC is now investigating claims that several hospitals returned people to care homes despite suspecting—or even knowing—they were infected.

The crisis was worsened by soaring staff absence rates. According to the *Guardian*, “Care homes have been running at 10 percent to 20 percent staff absence rates and many homes have been trying to isolate residents in their rooms to reduce infection spread, but this can also make their normal care more difficult and residents’ needs less visible.”

Absence rates in some homes are far higher. One care home manager in the north west of England told the *World Socialist Web Site* that up to 70 percent of staff had been off during the pandemic. “It’s been absolute chaos. It’s been like a whirlwind. Staff running out, never to be seen again. With the effect on staffing levels, it is impossible to keep a lid on it [the virus]. Residents without [mental] capacity but with no symptoms can spread the virus as they wander the halls and day rooms.”

Responding to Hancock’s lies, Martin Green, chief executive of Care England, the largest representative body for independent social care services, said he wanted to “see the evidence of what exactly the protective ring consists.” He said, “Ask them why, if in February the government was prioritising care homes, we did not see the statistics on deaths?”

On Monday, the *Guardian* reported fresh outbreaks of COVID-19 in care and nursing homes in west London. It cited Dr Anna Down, a clinical lead at a GP practice with 1,000 residents on its books in 15 privately run nursing homes. Down said, “Just when we thought there might be light at the end of the tunnel, two new or worsening care home outbreaks over the past 48 hours.”

In one home, 27 people had already died from confirmed or suspected COVID-19. The home, which “had not recorded any new cases for a fortnight, diagnosed eight of 22 people living in one of its units with the virus, when testing was carried out. Five residents have also been hospitalised in the past few days.”

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site