NHS FightBack photo of elderly patient lying on UK hospital floor sparks outrage on social media

Rory Woods
25 November 2021

Last Thursday evening, NHS FightBack received a photo of an elderly patient lying on the floor in the entrance to the Emergency Department of the Royal Bournemouth Hospital (RBH). RBH is a National Health Service (NHS) hospital.

When the photo was published on Facebook and Twitter, it triggered a mass response.

The posts have been shared widely, with hundreds of retweets and shares. On the NHS Fightback Facebook page alone, it has reached over five thousand people, with thousands "liking", sharing and commenting on the situation created by the UK government. On Twitter, it has been retweeted over eight hundred times, and liked 786 times, with almost one hundred quoted retweets.

Users responded with disbelief and anger that those seeking emergency help are being forced to lie in corridors, using words like "diabolical", "shocking", "heart breaking", "speechless" and "horrific".

Carl posted, "This country is seriously corrupt for this to go unchallenged, how the Tory establishment is not being tried for crimes against humanity, is beyond my comprehension!"

"This is right wing capitalist politics," Carol said.

Alison wrote, "The opening up of the economy and mixing of the people spreading the virus will just add massively to the already collapsing system. This is nothing to what it will look like in a month." She decried the "deliberate and systematic culling of the elderly and vulnerable by the government."

Responding to the picture's posting in the Anti Tory Values Group on Facebook, Louise wrote, "The social services costs are a typical example of Tory Party greed. They have NOT raised any income tax for the rich to pay their share of taxes. They have put up National Insurance for the poor to pay the taxes."

On the Defend Our NHS Facebook page, Stephanie called the image "shocking and heartbreaking." She said Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his cronies wanted to sell off the NHS "to the scavengers of the market place. They will line their pockets with gold for every aspect of the NHS sold to the Richest Bransons of this world. A pox upon their houses!"

Facebook user Owain posted, "The buck stops with the Tories who have closed hundreds of hospitals and got rid of over 30 thousand NHS staff and other key workers. And the mass media are helping them to say that the NHS is no longer fit for purpose and we need to put it up for privatisation."

GP and activist against the privatization of the NHS Dr Bob Gill retweeted the NHS Fightback post to his nearly twelve thousand followers, saying, "Been warning about meltdown in services for nearly 10 years. It is upon us and the political class remain immune from responsibility. Allies in media busy turning blind eye or redirecting blame. @UKLabour leadership complicit. Democracy my backside!"

Thriller writer Steven Dunne tweeted, "Tory Britain. A picture is worth a thousand words. #GTTO (Get the Tories Out)"

Many shared their own experiences. Doddsy@HelenDodds17 wrote, "I've seen people lying on 3 chairs, wrapped in blankets for hours in North Tees hospital."

"I spent 5hrs Wednesday evening waiting in A&E to be seen for severe dehydration due to gastroenteritis. I almost ended up laying across chairs to get some rest until I finally got seen. I can't blame the staff as they're doing the best they can, given the government has tied their hands" wrote Daniel @mrcraftyg.

@elaine_patten commented, "My husband waited nearly 6hrs to be seen by a Dr in ED [emergency department], 9hrs after initial 999 call, & over 10.5hrs until he was in a bed, feeling dreadful & in pain sitting in a chair all night in the Dept. This is no way to treat sick people, let alone a veteran."

© World Socialist Web Site

Anson Lewis said, “My mum waited 16hrs for an ambulance to arrive, stuck sat on a dining room chair with a broken hip.”

Pat Troake replied, “Friend of mine had a stroke rang for an ambulance, told 5 hours!!! They took him themselves, if they had waited for the ambulance he’d be dead, love the NHS but now not fit for purpose.”

Jules Charrington: “I have a friend who works in an A&E department and she has been witnessing queues of 8 hours outside just to get to the triage stage! She is a psychiatric nurse and they have been assessing people in the car park in order to get them through the system a little quicker.”

@WAeonghus: “Last week, I spent 18 hours in A&E in heartlands hospital in Birmingham with Bell’s palsy. The staff were run off their feet for all of that time. The ambulances were backed up outside. I’m angry at the Tories and their enablers for creating this disaster.”

@JayneNotPlain1: “My neighbour was 13 hours just to be seen in there and finally they admitted her for a heart problem and now she has caught COVID.”

The photo posted by NHS FightBack also received many international comments. Kate, an aid worker from Australia, tweeted, “Living with COVID. This is beyond disgusting. It's bordering on third world health care. An elderly person lying on a floor for 4 hours.”

Colette in New Zealand tweeted, “This is damn appalling!” Another person tweeted from New Zealand, “I’m guessing this is what the National Party & others who want Aotearoa/NZ to open up would like to see happen. Is this what the “freedom” fighters want & are protesting for?”

N Yacoubi tweeted in French, “The English aristocracy helped politicians to plunder the nation.”

Some retweeted the photo to mainstream media outlets including the BBC, ITN, the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun*, criticising their constant downplaying of the pandemic in order to keep the economy open and satiate the profit interests of the super-rich. Many directed their retweets to members of the Johnson government, particularly Health Secretary Sajid Javid.

“@sajidjavid is this your parent? @BorisJohnson yours? Of course it’s not. You can afford to pay privately. #SaveOurNHS,” tweeted one person.

David Sainty commented, “It can be guaranteed that you will never see a photo of a royal, an aristocrat or a Tory MP laid for hours on a hospital floor awaiting treatment.”

Describing the situation on Thursday evening at the RBH, an eyewitness told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “There were probably more than 12 ambulances stationed outside to handover patients. One female paramedic was waiting outside in the cold with a fully wrapped-up patient who was on a wheelchair. Corridors were full with paramedics and patients on stretchers waiting to be triaged. Then I saw the weary and busy ED staff trying to deal with so many things at once.

“All the chairs in the waiting area were occupied and some patients and their relatives were standing. Then I saw this elderly person lying on the floor at the entrance to the ED covered in blankets to shield them from the draft coming from outside, as the door was constantly opening and shutting. Their young relative was there comforting them as much as they could. By 9pm, they had waited for 4-and-a-half-hours to be seen. God knows how long that patient had to lie there for!”

A senior clinician said waiting times to handover patients were more than 11 hours that evening, adding that they were “trying to transfer patients to empty beds in special units regardless of there not being enough staff to look after them.”

According to a nurse, at around midnight on Friday the staff member who deals with beds went around the hospital trying to find 16 spaces for patients. They were insisting that others had to be moved to other wards, units and escalation areas, regardless of whether the patients were asleep, in order to accommodate new admissions.

Like other NHS hospitals up and down the country, the RBH has been under enormous pressure over the last period due to underfunding, staff shortages and COVID-19 outbreaks. Earlier this month, University Hospitals Dorset Trust (UHD), of which the RBH is a part, declared an internal incident due to these overwhelming pressures, placing it under Operation Pressures Escalation Level (OPEL) 4—the highest.

COVID-19 admissions have more than tripled since the third week of last month. In the same period, COVID-19 related staff absences have gone up from 110 to 142.

The WSWS urges all NHS and social care workers to contact us with their experiences. For more information, visit NHS FightBack.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site