

RCN Briefing

Beyond winter pressures: The endemic crisis of corridor care in the UK

In June 2024, nursing staff declared a 'national emergency' over corridor careⁱ – the unsafe and undignified practice of patients receiving treatment and/or waiting for assessment, admission or transfer in spaces that were not originally designated, planned, designed, equipped or staffed for patient care.

A year ago, we published '*On the frontline of the UK's corridor care crisis*' – a selection of harrowing testimonies from thousands of nursing staff across the UK who responded to our survey asking about their experiences of corridor care.ⁱⁱ

Their testimonies highlighted the widespread and devastating impacts of corridor care on patients; including dignity and privacy violations, patient safety risks and harm, and on nursing staff; including both mental and physical harm.

Following this, there was widespread condemnation of corridor care and some positive commitments from governments across the UK to eradicate corridor careⁱⁱⁱ and to collect and publish data about where and when it was happening.^{iv}

However, one year on the corridor care crisis is ongoing and the 'normalisation' we warned about in 2024 has become even more widespread. Evidence indicates that in some parts of the UK, corridor care has become embedded in hospitals' practice and is now an entrenched, year-round crisis.

Examples of evidence showing corridor care is year-round endemic crisis

- A [study](#) funded by the Royal College of Emergency Medicine (RCEM) of 165 UK Emergency Departments (ED) found that almost one in five (17.7% (n=10 042)) ED patients were receiving care in escalation areas and the percentage of escalation area patients in non-clinical areas such as corridors ranged from 54.5% to 61.1% during five snapshots in March 2025.
- A [Royal College of Physicians \(RCP\) survey](#) found 59% of physicians delivered care in temporary spaces (corridors, offices) between June-August 2025, across the UK, highlighting that this is a year round issue.
- An [RCEM survey](#) in Summer 2025 covering England revealed that almost one in five patients were being cared for in corridors with 78% of emergency department leads feeling that patients were harmed by this.
- [Freedom of information \(FOI\) requests](#) by The British Medical Journal to NHS trusts in England revealed the extent to which A&E corridor care is becoming normalised, with responses showing that over 532,000 patients were treated in escalation areas in A&Es in 2024-25, an increase from the prior year.
- An RCEM snapshot [survey](#) in January and February 2025 found 12 out of 12 Welsh EDs had patients being treated in corridors.

- The Health Service Journal (HSJ) [reported](#) that there were 523,858 instances of corridor care in the 12 months to September 2025 (based on FOI requests sent to NHS trusts in England) and replicating the same level across the hospitals that did not provide data suggested around 930,000 cases nationally.
- Between April and October 2025, 10,536 people signed [a petition](#) calling on the Welsh Senedd to end corridor care in Wales.
- In November 2025, Age UK published a [report](#) highlighting that corridor care in England was becoming normalised with a 525-fold increase in the number of instances of corridor care of 12 hours or more since 2015/16. It emphasised the impacts of corridor care and long waits on older people.
- In December 2025, the RCN [highlighted](#) the pressures on the NHS in England and how rising demand, pressures, and challenges with patient flow for emergency and elective services has contributed to the persistence of corridor care, and why winter pressures risk making the situation worse.
- In January 2026, [a report](#) from the Health Services Safety Investigations Body (HSSIB) found that corridor care takes place throughout the year with the practice becoming normalised across the NHS in England. They also highlighted that the lack of consistent data and the absence of shared definitions and terminology prohibited a full understanding of the impacts of corridor care on patient safety.
- In January 2026, the (Glasgow) Herald newspaper, recognising the RCN's concerns that "the Scottish Government does not record or publish statistics on the number of patients being treated in corridors," [used an FOI request to ask](#) "every health board in Scotland for the design capacity of its emergency departments, and the number of beds occupied on the first of every month in 2025." All the examples quoted by the Herald showed hospitals running at over-capacity in terms of emergency bed space in the period inquired about.

RCN members report that corridor care has become a permanent fixture

Despite some governments committing to collecting and publishing data on the prevalence of corridor care, there has been insufficient progress to date and there remains a lack of robust transparent data on care being delivered in inappropriate spaces/corridor care across the UK. The absence of agreed terminology, data collection and reporting processes and metrics means that the prevalence and impacts of corridor care cannot be fully understood.^v

In the absence of this data, the RCN contacted members who responded to our January 2025 survey to ask them if and how corridor care was affecting them a year later.

The responses we received from hundreds of nursing staff indicate that rather than being eradicated, corridor care has become a "permanent fixture" in some NHS hospitals, extending beyond emergency departments, including acute assessment units, respiratory wards, surgical wards and elderly care wards.

Nursing staff told us that the lack of action by governments has left them feeling "ashamed" and "embarrassed" about the unsafe, undignified care they are forced to deliver to patients, and that they are "losing all hope".

Examples of testimony from nursing staff

“Basically, nothing has changed and to be honest it is getting worse each day. It is a nightmare for nurses.” (Nurse working in an acute NHS hospital in the East of England).

“It’s very stressful and distressing at times. There’s a sense of frustration and hopelessness” (Nurse working in an NHS board in Scotland).

“The system is broken and so are we.” (Nurse working in the South East of England).

“I go home and worry about my patients and my colleagues being forced to deliver this undignified care. I worry about it a lot and it is something that causes pre-shift anxiety.” (Nurse working in the West Midlands).

“Demoralising, feelings of failure and inadequacy, frustration, morally compromised” (Nurse working in Wales)

“We would not treat animals like this in a veterinary practice, so why in a hospital?” (Nurse working in the South West of England).

“You feel you are letting the patient down by the lack of respect and dignity” (Nurse working in Northern Ireland)

Nursing staff report treating patients in freezing cold corridors, dining rooms, staff kitchens, offices, seminar rooms, family rooms, deceased viewing rooms and departure lounges. Respondents cite shocking examples of their experience of corridor care, including a patient being left in a chair for four days, while another patient reportedly died after choking undetected in a corridor. There was also a reported example of nursing staff having resorted to holding up white sheets to protect patient dignity when performing intimate procedures, while another told of a corridor in one hospital so full of patients that an elderly patient was left to eat next to someone vomiting.

In their testimonies, nursing staff consistently raise serious concerns about the impact of corridor care on the elderly, including those with dementia, and those with mental ill health. For example, a nurse in the North West of England said: *“It breaks my heart being in work and there being a patient, usually elderly, on the corridor and coming back two days later and them still being there.”* We also heard from a nurse in London that elderly patients regularly spent 24hrs in corridors on trolleys and as a result develop incontinence and pick up respiratory viruses which have led to *“extreme critical incidents including death.”*

Another nurse in Yorkshire said a terminally ill patient spent a week in a “temporary escalation space” before being moved into a side room where they died. The nurse said: *“I won’t ever forget that.”*

A nurse in a mental health ward in Wales said corridor care was now a *“regular occurrence”*, with staff having to provide more regular monitoring due to an increased risk of self-harm and suicide posed by objects and fittings present in an unsecure corridor. A nurse in the North of England said there was *“no privacy to discuss deeply personal information regarding a patient’s mental state and social situation which led to an overdose.”*

Nursing staff not only report having a lack of access to vital lifesaving equipment such as oxygen and suction, but also say there are simply too few staff to care for the number of patients being placed in non-clinical areas. A nurse in the North West of England said

trust planning meant no more than six patients should be in the corridor at any one time but that now *“it is becoming routine to care for up to 26 patients.”* A nurse working in the South East said they are delivering *“corridor care in even more inappropriate places. This week we have 30 patients consistently in our ED corridors, along with ambulance holds.”*

In Scotland, a nurse working on an acute surgical unit said *“It’s horrible, we are not staffed for these extra patients. We are not able to provide care that we want to a standard we would like. It’s creating moral injury and sickness amongst staff.”*

A nurse in Northern Ireland said they were *“Embarrassed that this is the standard of care I have to provide”.*

Public confirms widespread corridor care and calls for urgent action

In January 2026, YouGov undertook public polling on the issue of corridor care across the UK, commissioned by the RCN to help us to understand more about the prevalence of the issue.¹ The polling found that:

- Two in ten (18%) UK adults have witnessed NHS care in non-medical spaces like a corridor in the last six months. Further RCN analysis shows that when looking at only those who accessed care, the figure is more than one in three (37%).
- In England, the polling also shows that the public want faster action on the issue, with seven in ten (69%) respondents saying the Government’s pledge to eradicate the practice in England by the “end of parliament” is “too slow”.
- Nine in ten (88%) of respondents across the UK consider tackling unsafe care an “urgent priority”.

What is the RCN calling for?

The updated testimonies from our members highlight the shocking prevalence and permanence of corridor care across the UK. Government recognition of the problem and commitments to tackle it are positive, but there has been a lack of concrete action to deliver on this.

Governments across the UK must provide urgent, fully funded action plans to improve patient flow through health and care systems and eradicate corridor care, including investment in beds, the nursing workforce, community services and social care.

Transparency is key to making progress towards eradication of corridor care. Corridor care data must be captured and published as soon as possible and included in regular publicly available NHS performance data. This is critical to building a true understanding of the prevalence and trends in corridor care, and the impact on patients and staff. It is imperative to monitor progress and to ensure that resources are reaching the areas of greatest need. Crucially, this data must cover not only emergency settings, but also ward areas, where we know from nursing staff that corridor care is increasingly taking place.

Alongside system level data reporting, we call for parliamentary-level reporting on the instances of corridor care every quarter alongside an overview of the actions

¹ All figures, unless otherwise stated, are from YouGov Plc. This was a UK-wide survey and the total sample size was 2,150 UK adults. Fieldwork was undertaken between 4 -5 January 2026. The survey was carried out online. The figures have been weighted and are representative of all UK adults (aged 18+).

governments are taking to reduce occurrences, with the opportunity for politicians to debate the issue.

For more of the RCN's work on corridor care see:

- [Corridor care: unsafe, undignified, unacceptable](#) (published June 2024):
- [On the Frontline of the UK's Corridor Care Crisis](#) (published January 2025)
- [Ending corridor care in Wales](#) (published January 2025)
- [Bracing for winter](#) (published December 2025)

References

ⁱ RCN (2024) Corridor care: unsafe, undignified, unacceptable. Available at: [Publications | Royal College of Nursing](#)

ⁱⁱ RCN (2025) On the Frontline of the UK's Corridor Care Crisis, Available at: [Corridor care crisis | Publications | Royal College of Nursing](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ Scottish Government (2025) NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde emergency department review: response. Available at: [Response - NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde emergency department review: response - gov.scot](#); DHSC (2025) How the government is tackling winter pressures. Available at: [How the government is tackling winter pressures – Department of Health and Social Care Media Centre](#)

^{iv} DHSC (2025) How the government is tackling winter pressures. Available at: [How the government is tackling winter pressures – Department of Health and Social Care Media Centre](#)

^v HSSIB (2026) Investigation report Patient care in temporary care environments. Available at: [Patient care in temporary care environments](#)