

Revealed: how elderly paid price of protecting NHS from Covid

- ▶ Over-80s were denied intensive care
- ▶ Drastic steps to stop wards being overrun

INSIGHT

Elderly people were excluded from hospitals and intensive care during the height of the pandemic's first wave as part of efforts to stop the NHS being overrun, an Insight investigation can reveal.

Documents drawn up at the request of Chris Whitty, England's chief medical officer, devised guidelines — called a "triage tool" — that were later used to prevent many elderly



and doctors. One intensive care doctor said the triage tool stopped so many elderly patients being admitted to intensive care in his hospital that many critical care beds were empty. Instead, patients were left to die on the wards.

NHS data obtained by Insight reveals stark differences in the way intensive care was used for different age groups.

Patients over the age of 80 made up 60% of the total deaths from the virus, but only

show that the proportion of those admitted to hospital aged over 60 who were receiving intensive care treatment halved as the pressure grew during the height of the pandemic.

The new findings undermine claims by Matt Hancock, the health secretary, that "everybody who needed care was able to get that care" during the first wave.

As part of a three-month investigation into the government's handling of the crisis during lockdown, The Sunday Times has spoken to more than 50 witnesses, including doctors, bereaved families, care home workers, politicians and government advisers.

Our inquiries unearthed evidence that a variety of steps

ting out groups of elderly people, including all care home residents and those who had asked not to be resuscitated, who should not ordinarily be conveyed to hospital without the permission of a senior doctor

- Ambulance and admission teams were told to be more selective about who to take into hospital. One paramedic reported visiting case after case where people had died from heart attacks after being left too long in their homes while suffering from the virus

- Care home owners expressed frustration that their residents were refused access to hospital. One described how eight patients were left to die from the virus in the home before the hospital began admitting his residents again. The five who went to hospital after that survived.

The disclosures come as yesterday Professor Neil Ferguson, whose modelling influenced the decision to lock down in March, warned that "the health system will not be able to cope" if Covid-19 cases

Dr Chaand Nagpaul, chairman of the British Medical Association, said: "It is manifestly the case that large numbers of patients did not receive the care that they needed and that's because the health service didn't have the resources ... Now we are walking into a second crisis without having learnt crucial, even life-saving lessons."

The Conservative MP David Davis said the government's strategy had had "fatal consequences for thousands whose lives could have been rescued". He added: "The policy appears to have given the least care to those who needed it most. It is profoundly wrong that the government did not come

clean to the public about this tragedy."

The Department of Health said yesterday that the "triage tool" had been commissioned by Whitty and the other UK medical directors. It said it was part of planning for a worst-case scenario and "when it became clear this would not happen, the guidance was not developed further, therefore was never distributed, or implemented".

On Friday, Stephen Powis, national medical director of NHS England, issued a statement saying all patients had been treated equally. He said: "The NHS repeatedly instructed staff that no patient who could benefit from treatment should be denied it, and thanks to people following government guidance, even at the height of the pandemic there was no shortage of ventilators and intensive care."

[Read the full story](#)



WE ARE WALKING INTO A SECOND CRISIS WITHOUT HAVING LEARNT

