

Failures in basic care causing 1000 hospital deaths a month

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At least 1000 patients are dying unnecessarily every month in English hospitals from Acute Kidney Injury according to a new study commissioned by the NHS.

The condition is sometimes called ‘the silent killer’ because it goes unnoticed by medical staff. It is currently causing nearly eight times as many deaths as MRSA at its peak yet most patients haven’t heard of it and many doctors overlook it.

The research, which was carried out by Insight Health Economics in collaboration with leading experts on kidney disease and commissioned by NHS Improving Quality, is the most robust study into Acute Kidney Injury ever undertaken in the UK. It shows that Acute Kidney Injury is five times more prevalent than previously thought and may affect as many as 1 in 7 patients in English hospitals.

It costs the NHS over £1 billion a year – more than breast, lung and bowel cancer combined.

Acute Kidney Injury is the sudden loss of kidney function. It can affect people with no history of kidney disease and can cause the heart, lungs and brain to stop working properly. It can lead to rapid deterioration. Many patients die and those who do recover are at increased risk of long term kidney disease.

Severe dehydration is one of the main causes of Acute Kidney Injury but infections such as pneumonia or even flu can also lead to AKI. People who suffer vomiting and diarrhoea are at increased risk if they are also taking common medications for high blood pressure or over-the-counter medicines like ibuprofen. Older people are particularly vulnerable to AKI but younger people are also affected. One in 25 of all hospital inpatients under the age of 40 will develop Acute Kidney Injury.

Professor Donal O’Donaghue, Consultant Renal Physician says ‘We know that at least a thousand people a month are dying in hospital from Acute Kidney Injury due to poor care. These deaths are avoidable. This is completely unacceptable and we can’t allow it to continue. Good basic care would save these lives and save millions of pounds for the NHS’.

‘Doctors and nurses need to make elementary checks to prevent Acute Kidney Injury. In general, people who are having surgery shouldn’t be asked to go without water for longer than 2 hours. Sometimes that *is* unavoidable but then medical staff need to check their patients are not becoming dehydrated. They also need to be aware that some common medications increase the risk of Acute Kidney Injury.’

Marion Kerr, Health Economist, Insight Health Economics, says ‘Acute Kidney Injury costs the NHS more than £1 billion every year – that’s more than we spend on breast, lung and bowel cancer combined. Every day more than 30 people are dying needlessly. Compare that to MRSA which was killing about 4 people a day at its peak. Simple improvements in basic care could save the NHS £200 million pounds a year and, more importantly, save thousands of lives.’

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Notes to Editors:

1 *The economic impact of acute kidney injury in England* was authored by Marion Kerr, Insight Health Economics, Professor Donal O'Donoghue, Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust, Salford, Dr Michael Bedford, Department of Renal Medicine, East Kent hospitals University NHS Foundation Trust, Canterbury, Beverley Matthews, NHS Improving Quality. It will be published at 00.05 on 22 April and, after that date, will be available at:

<http://ndt.oxfordjournals.org/content/early/2014/04/21/ndt.gfu016.full>

Advance copies of the full report available on request.

2 ONS figures indicate 1556 deaths in which MRSA mentioned in 2006.

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/datasets-and-tables/index.html?pageSize=50&sortBy=none&sortDirection=none&newquery=deaths+from+MRSA&content-type=Reference+table&content-type=Dataset>