

3,000 patients die of thirst in hospitals every month

By Jan Disley

UP TO 40,000 NHS hospital patients are dying of thirst every year according to damning official figures released today.

The toll – five times higher than expected – is due to avoidable kidney problems sparked by poor care.

Many of the 3,000 deaths a month are simply from patients not being given enough to drink.

The shocking report says acute kidney injury (AKI) causes between 15,000 and 40,000 excess deaths every year and costs the health service £1 billion to treat.

The figure means AKI – involving sudden loss of kidney function – is responsible for eight times as many fatalities as superbug MRSA at its peak. Severe dehydration is one of the main causes.

One consultant said: “We can’t allow it to continue. Good basic care would save these lives and save millions of pounds for the NHS.”

People with conditions such as heart failure or diabetes and those admitted to hospital with infections are susceptible. AKI can also develop after major surgery.

Professor Donal O’Donoghue, consultant renal physician at Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust, co-authored the NHS-commissioned report along with Insight Health Economics.

He said: “We know that at least

FOOTBALLER DIALLED 999 IN DESPERATE PLEA FOR WATER



Kane, 22, and his mother Rita Cronin

THE scandal of patients “dying of thirst” is highlighted by the case of 22-year-old Kane Gorny.

The keen footballer, who was having a hip replacement, phoned police from his hospital bed in 2009 because he was so desperate for a drink.

When officers arrived at St George’s hospital in South London, nurses said he was in a confused state and sent them away. The supermarket worker died of dehydration hours later.

His mother Rita Cronin said there was “no communication between staff”.

In 2012, Tracey Holmes, 51,

told how she had to smuggle ice lollies into a ward to help her dying mother Sandra Aston. Nurses at Alexandra hospital in Redditch were said to have left Mrs Aston, 79, so dehydrated her lips cracked and bled.

Last summer a 100-year-old great-grandmother allegedly died from thirst because a water jug was broken. Lydia Spilner went into Leicester Royal Infirmary with a chest infection but died four weeks later after a “catastrophic error” in care.

Her family claim they begged nurses to put her on a drip but it took 10 days and was too late.

1,000 people a month are dying in hospital from AKI due to poor care.

“These deaths are avoidable. This is completely unacceptable. Doctors and nurses need to make elementary checks.

“In general, people who are having surgery shouldn’t be asked to go without water for longer than two 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 AKI.”

Marion Kerr, health economist at Insight Health Economics, said: “AKI 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 with MRSA which was killing about four 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.”

A spokesman for NHS England said: “We have taken steps to ensure the NHS puts in place coherent long-term plans to reduce avoidable deaths in our hospitals.”

The scandal was highlighted by The Daily Express last year when Nice guidelines were changed so all NHS staff took into account a diagnosis of AKI – not just renal units.

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