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Our health service is near breaking point, widow warns

AN ELDERLY woman has slammed the service she received at Torbay Hospital.

Jean Sargeant, aged 85, from Bovey Tracey, spent more than seven hours waiting at the hospital's A&E department, only to be sent home without being seen. 'I feel I've been to hell and back,' she said.

She explained: 'I suffer from heart failure, and on Monday my cleaner said I looked so poorly she called for my GP to visit me. When the doctor arrived she took one look at me and told me to go straight to Torbay Hospital.'

Jean's granddaughter took her to the health facility where she was told to wait in the A&E department until she was seen.

'It was awful, a simply dreadful experience' Jean said.

'There was someone who said they had had a heart attack and were still waiting 12 hours later. People were waiting in corridors.'

'I sat there all day without anything to eat or drink. I asked for a cup of tea a couple of times but no-one brought me anything.'

Eventually widow Jean was allocated a curtained cubicle and a doctor came to see her at 8pm that night.

'He was so tired and looked absolutely dead on his feet. He said he was sorry but there were no beds and I'd

by **PATRICK BEASLEY**



have to go home. They were sending home anyone who could walk out.

'They offered me an ambulance but I was able to get someone to drive me

home.'

Cathy Gardner, head of operations at Torbay and South Devon NHS Foundation Trust, said: 'I am really sorry to hear about this patient's experiences.'

'At this time of year we do have plans in place to help our staff and departments cope under the additional pressure and all our staff work really hard to provide the best possible service even at very busy times.'

'Our triage nurses carry out an initial assessment of each individual who comes into the department, so that we can prioritise those who have life-threatening conditions.'

Ms Gardner continued: 'While we aim to then treat everyone as quickly as we can, we know that our emergency department has been extremely busy recently and people have had to wait longer than any of us would like.'

Mrs Sargeant was eventually seen two days later when she returned for tests.

She said: 'The staff who work for the NHS are wonderful. They are above criticism for the work they do. It's just that they are rushed off their feet and can't cope with the sheer number of people.'

'I just want the message to get out that the service is failing us, and it makes me angry.'