Measuring disability and mortality following relocation within the NHS

SIR—We have previously reported that moving patients following closure of a NHS continuing care unit was not associated with an increase in mortality or disability compared to a control group [1]. In late 2000, a further NHS continuing care ward closed in North Staffordshire and we now report the one-year follow-up results using similar methodology. The patients (those who transferred wards) and the controls (patients from a remaining ward who did not transfer) had similar base line characteristics. The mean age of the 16 patients was 84.4 years (range 67–100 years) compared to 81 years (75–100) in the 25 controls. Median (range) initial Barthel scores and Crichton Behavioural Rating scores after transfer for patients and controls respectively were 2 (0–11) and 1 (0–7) and 36 (14–48) and 32 (22–47) (both not significantly different). The one-year mortality was also not significantly different in the two groups: 37.5% in the patients and 34.6% in the controls. Survival analysis also revealed that there was no difference in the timing of death (75th percentile, 161 days in the patient group and 213 days in the control group, log rank test).

As in the previous move great care was taken to involve patients, families and staff in preparation for the move that as in the earlier move took place under external scrutiny. Our results support the view that the planned move of even the most frail of older patients can be conducted safely. These results also add to the growing literature on this subject [2].

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