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Peer warns mandatory covid vaccination policy for health staff will put vulnerable at risk

A FAILURE to tackle the care home staffing crisis is taking "catastrophic risks with the most vulnerable in society," the House of Lords will hear tomorrow.

By **LUCY JOHNSTON** SUNDAY EXPRESS HEALTH SOCIAL AFFAIRS EDITOR

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Up to 70,000 care home workers are expected to leave as a result of the covid vaccination policy

(Image: Getty)



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Baroness Altmann, a former pensions minister, will tell Parliament that the care home sector is "edging closer to disaster" as staff numbers fall, and will warn the mandatory vaccination policy could cost thousands of lives.

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Last week, **Health Secretary Sajid Javid** told care home workers: "If you cannot be bothered to go and get vaccinated, then get out and go and get another job."

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Up to 70,000 care home workers are expected to leave as a result of the policy, leading Baroness Altmann to question how the shortfall will be made up. "Care workers aren't lying around somewhere at the back of a closet," she said.

Fellow experts condemned the jabs mandate as "another kick in the teeth" for carers already afflicted by low pay and burnout.

There are currently more than 150,000 vacancies in the sector in England, a field which has traditionally suffered with staffing problems partly because it competes with the NHS.



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Vacancy problems have already been compounded by post-Brexit migration rules, meaning carers from overseas do not reach the new higher income threshold to be eligible to work in the UK.

Many carers are switching to the hospitality sector, where a high proportion of workers left after Brexit.

The Government is estimating that between 40,000 to 70,000 of Britain's 570,000 CQC-registered care home staff will refuse the vaccine and will no longer be able to care for residents when the mandatory jab policy comes into force on November 11.



Baroness Altmann is due to speak at the second reading of the Health and Social Care bill on Monday
(Image: PA)

And Baroness Altmann, who is due to speak at the second reading of the Health and Social Care bill tomorrow, says that policy will make the situation even worse.

“We seem to be moving ever closer to disaster in the care sector,” she said.

“We’ve had scare story after scare story and we are really no closer to solving the staffing crisis. Without staff we cannot look after people. Care homes have faced years of shortages and inadequate funding. Many are on the brink of bankruptcy and some will close.

“The vaccination policy will lead to tens of thousands more staff leaving in an already over-stretched service. How does the Government propose to fill the gap of those who have to leave?”

“Care workers aren't lying around somewhere at the back of a closet.”

The Conservative peer added: “The reality is, if you lose great numbers of staff you will have shortages and this will clearly run risks with people's lives.

“The Government's vaccine mandate is a catastrophic policy which could cost thousands of lives.

“This staffing crisis has long been a ticking time bomb and the fuse is shortening, and, unfortunately, the failure to address it will impact on the frailest in our society. The shortage means that we are taking catastrophic risks with the most vulnerable in society.”



There are currently more than 150,000 care worker vacancies in England (Image: Getty)

Professor Martin Green, chief executive of Care England, a charity that represents care home owners, predicted that homes would close as a result.

He said: "The vaccine mandate will mean that staff will be forced to get jobs out of the sector and this will increase existing staffing shortages. As a result, there will not be a safe level of staff in many places, while others will be forced to close.

"If there is a lack of staff in social care, then Health Secretary Sajid Javid has a problem in the NHS as well, because frail and elderly patients will have nowhere to be discharged.

"With the winter hospital crisis looming due to the huge backlog of elective surgery as well as the increase in hospitalisation due to winter viruses, the trail of this policy will end up on the desk of Mr Javid and hit the NHS.

"We need a systematic approach to social care and realistic funding. While I am supportive of Covid vaccines, staff may have good reason not to get the vaccine.

"People have a right to say no. If the Government decides mandatory vaccination is necessary they need a contingency plan to fill the staff shortfall."