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Hospital staff 'caught on CCTV assaulting patients'



IMAGE SOURCE, ALAMY

Image caption,

The CQC said 17 staff at St Andrew's witnessed one incident in which a patient was assaulted, but did not report it

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The Care Quality Commission (CQC) has revealed widespread allegations of physical and sexual assaults by staff on patients at a mental health hospital.

Inspectors saw CCTV footage of staff at St Andrew's Healthcare in Northampton kicking and hitting a patient during a restraint as colleagues watched on.

"A staff member involved in the incident could be seen smiling as well as looking at the CCTV camera," the CQC report said.

The BBC has previously revealed that a police inquiry is under way into the allegations. The hospital, which takes NHS patients from across the country, has apologised and said improvements were being made.

The CQC report highlighted the regulator's "extreme concern" over "the high number of incidents of alleged assaults by staff members on patients".

On one occasion in June, attempts to restrain a patient put their life at risk due to it being "unsafe" and "disproportionate", it said.

The patient was kicked, had their airway restricted and was hit in the face with an open hand.

None of the 17 staff members present raised concerns, the report stated.

That incident happened on a ward for people with learning disabilities and autism. A further 26 further incidents caught on CCTV were reviewed during the inspection in August and July.

Twelve raised concerns over the care and treatment of patients, and six were described as "high level".

Staff were seen leaning on a patient's joints and pushing them forward by placing pressure on their back.

The footage also captured staff "dragging a patient into seclusion" with their genitals exposed, alongside two further incidents in which patients were assaulted in unspecified ways.

Patients were also held down by their chests using a technique deemed to be dangerous – on one occasion for 75 minutes.

Staff suspended

The CQC said a number of staff had been suspended "pending investigations, across the division, following allegations of psychological, sexual or physical abuse" of patients.

Between 11 July and the end of August, the CQC received seven allegations of assault by staff on patients.

The allegations included physical assault, sexual assault and financial abuse.

The CQC has imposed an urgent condition on the hospital's registration, and new admissions have been restricted.

Craig Howarth, the CQC's deputy director of mental health, said: "This inspection took place due to a serious incident on a ward involving an alleged assault by a member of staff."

He added: "In addition to this incident, we saw evidence of closed cultures on wards and several other incidents which were improper, abusive inappropriate and unsafe.

"People accessing mental health services should be kept safe while receiving care that meets their needs. St Andrew's has failed to deliver this and must make urgent improvements."

St Andrew's is a charity which provides specialist care for people with some of the most complex and challenging mental health needs.

It looks after about 600 patients and employs more than 4,000 people across four locations, including the one in Northampton.

According to the Charity Commission, it had an income of almost £220m in the year ending March 2024.

An **inspection earlier this year** saw the Northampton hospital's rating downgraded to "inadequate" after "unacceptable" failings were identified, and the hospital was put into special measures.

In response, St Andrew's has come up with an action plan including extra CCTV, a management restructuring and new executive appointments.

A spokesman said: "We acknowledge that care at our Northampton hospital hasn't always met the standards every patient deserves, and we are sorry to those affected.

"We reported these issues to the CQC immediately and are working with the NHS and the CQC to deliver urgent improvements."

Their statement added: "Our action plan includes stronger staff training, new leadership, external expertise to foster an open culture and reducing agency staff to near zero.

"We're also reviewing services to focus on complex mental health care for those who need us most.

"While change takes time, patients are already seeing early signs of improvement."