

Extraordinary dedication of granddaughter who slept on hospital floor to give pneumonia victim food, water and 24-hour care

By Sam Greenhill

WHEN 89-year-old Margaret Park's family were told she had only hours to live, they gathered by her hospital bed to say goodbye.

But baffled as to how a pensioner who had gone to hospital with a bad back could now be at death's door, they decided to ignore the doctors' grim prognosis and nurse her back to health themselves.

For three weeks, her granddaughter Hazel Carter slept on the hospital floor and provided round-the-clock care with the help of her 20-year-old son John.

Mrs Carter, 41, is convinced her grandmother - whom she later discovered was suffering from pneumonia - would now be dead without her intervention.

One of her first acts was to stop medics from giving Mrs Park morphine.

She said: 'The morphine meant my grandmother had no will to fight back, and she had always been a very strong person. When she stopped getting it, she was able to fight for her life.'

Also against doctors' advice, she fed Mrs Park despite the 'nil by mouth' on her notes. 'I gave her custard because it was easy to swallow,' she said. 'It's obvious you'll never get better unless you have food to give you strength.'

Mrs Park was admitted to Blackpool Victoria Hospital in March, and doctors found she had pneumonia - inflammation of the lung tissue, which is normally treated with antibiotics and oxygen. She was put on a saline drip and given oxygen

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through a mask. But Mrs Carter said she did not find out about the pneumonia at first and believed her grandmother was merely getting over treatment for a bad back and a chest infection.

As a result, she says she found it impossible to accept that her grandmother was close to death.

She said: 'It was a Sunday and I received a call and rushed to the hospital and by the time I got there, the whole family were around her bed. They were all saying their goodbyes to her, and I said mine too.'

'Then one by one, we all left, thinking we would never see her again. But I just couldn't accept it, and I couldn't understand why she was dying. So I went back to the hospital, and sat with her.'

'I began to realise there were things I could do. She kept knocking off her oxygen mask, so I put it back and held it in place.'

'Then she was trying to clear her chest, but the drugs were hampering her efforts. As the morphine wore off, she was getting better at it, so I asked the nurse to stop the morphine altogether and it helped. She had the strength to clear her chest.'

'I stayed the night on her floor, and the next day a consultant told us she had pneumonia and, as she was very old, it would be a miracle if she lived through it.'

'But as time went on, she did improve. I stayed every single day and night, with my son John helping out too.'

For the first ten days, Mrs Carter slept on the floor but then someone brought in a blow-up mattress for her. She believes that much of the care she was providing should

have been given by nurses, but she found they were simply too busy.

Mrs Carter would turn her grandmother, clean her, feed her and ensure she was given the correct medication that she had been on before going into hospital. 'I didn't want to make a fuss or interfere, because I didn't want the nurses to throw me out, but I just stayed there and kept her fed and watered, and massaged her limbs, and made sure she had everything she needed,' she said.

'The nurses on the ward work horrendous hours, and it wasn't their fault, they were just so busy. And everyone was saying she was going to die anyway.'

'I can't really knock anyone at the hospital. When they realised my grandmother was actually getting

better, they dealt with it properly.'

The constant care meant that Mrs Park began to make a steady recovery, but still the family were told she would not walk again or be able to return to live with her 89-year-old husband Jack. Again, however, Mrs Carter refused to accept the negative outlook.

She helped her grandmother to

'They would have let me fade away'

walk again and, incredibly, three weeks after the family had said their goodbyes, she was returning to her bungalow home in the village of Hambleton, near Blackpool. Her recovery seemed so remarkable that

a hospital consultant even telephoned Mrs Carter in tears to congratulate her.

She said: 'There was one junior specialist who was genuinely overwhelmed by it, and he was crying. He telephoned me after we went home to say I was the best nurse he had ever met, though of course I'm not a nurse.'

But her experience has left Mrs Carter, who runs a building firm with her husband, with the fear that old people are too easily written off by hospitals. It is a fear reflected in the Daily Mail's long-running Dignity for the Elderly campaign.

She said: 'My grandmother has always been such an inspiration to me. She and my grandad were married after the war and were farmers, and worked so hard. She had a

farm shop, she did B&B, afternoon teas and even bred dogs.'

'They are still an amazing couple. My grandad still drives and brings her to visit us.'

'I have managed to stop her from crying every time she sees me, but she still can't stop thanking me and my son for what we did. But anyone would do the same.'

In September, Mr and Mrs Park celebrated their wedding anniversary with a family party.

Mrs Park said: 'What Hazel did is keep me alive. 'Everybody seemed so busy in the hospital. I didn't feel I was getting a lot of attention. 'She was a right little gem. I think they would have let me fade away if Hazel hadn't been there.'

The hospital declined to comment. s.greenhill@daily.co.uk

Family nurse gran back to life after doctors give up on her

My hero: Margaret Park with Hazel Carter and, inset, on her wedding day in the 1940s

