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Japanese earthquake takes heavy toll on ageing population

Shocking stories of deaths emerge as the military is enlisted to help at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant

Robert Booth, and **Justin McCurry** in Tokyo
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An elderly couple sit near a woodburning stove in gymnasium being used to house those displaced by the Japanese earthquake and tsunami in town of Otsuchi Photograph: IFRC/Getty Images

The devastating impact of the Japanese earthquake on the country's ageing population was exposed on Thursday as dozens of elderly people were confirmed dead in hospitals and residential homes as heating fuel and medicine ran out.

In one particularly shocking incident, Japan's self-defence force discovered 128 elderly people abandoned by medical staff at a hospital six miles from the stricken Fukushima nuclear plant. Most of them were comatose and 14 died shortly afterwards. Eleven others were reported dead at a retirement home in Kesenuma because of freezing