

# Hospital care pathway won't be banned... but it could get a new name

## Inquiry set to back end-of-life plan, despite public fears

**THE controversial Liverpool Care Pathway is to stay in use in hospitals - but its name may change.**

Complaints by hundreds of families to the Health Service Ombudsman have failed to persuade an official inquiry to ban the Pathway, which is meant to ease the last hours of the dying.

Families say elderly patients have died unnecessarily and before their time because of the LCP, according to evidence from the watchdog revealed today.

They also say patients whose condition worsened because of poor hospital treatment have then been killed off after being put on the Pathway.

The watchdog has heard allegations that even when the LCP has been properly applied, it has failed to provide the terminally ill with either pain relief or dignity and respect.

The fast-rising numbers of com-

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plaints made to the NHS Ombudsman have been detailed in a paper given to the official inquiry into the LCP. However the inquiry, ordered by Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt and headed by Baroness Neuberger, is understood to have pushed aside evidence of public disquiet in its findings, to be published later this month.

Instead it is due to give hospitals the green light to continue using the Pathway under a new set of rules and guidelines. The inquiry is expected to try to restore the Pathway's reputation by ending bribes to hospitals. It will call for a halt to the distribution of millions of pounds by NHS trusts to hospitals that hit targets for numbers of patients who die while on it.

Lady Neuberger will also recommend that families must be kept informed by doctors and nurses, and she may call for the tainted

name Liverpool Care Pathway to be changed in attempt to reassure families. A name change has been backed by Mr Hunt.

The Pathway, which has come into use in most hospitals over the past five years, is meant for when medical staff decide patients are in their last hours of life.

Typically it involves heavy sedation and the withdrawal of life-sus-

### **'Against the wishes of the family'**

taining treatment, including tubes providing fluids and nutrition. On average, a patient dies 33 hours after being put on the Pathway.

Mr Hunt ordered the inquiry late last year after protests from senior medical figures and following allegations made to the Daily Mail by families of patients.

The report to Lady Neuberger by the Health Service Ombudsman

said that since 2010 nearly 500 complaints about NHS end of life care have been made to the watchdog.

The scale and persistence of complaints to the Ombudsman - 152 in the year to March 2012 and 186 in the following 12 months - undermine the claims of Pathway supporters that its poor reputation is a result of media 'hysteria'.

The Ombudsman paper said in some cases relatives raise concerns about patients being put on the LCP 'against the wishes of the patient and their family'.

In such cases complainants often argue that the decision may have led to 'an unnecessary or premature death'. Relatives also say that 'they were unaware the patient was placed on the LCP, or that they were not given enough information to understand what this involved'.

In a new criticism of the LCP the paper also said many claimed it was failing in its central aim of giving the patient a dignified death.

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