

Spending **OUR** money to stop **US** being told the truth about **OUR** public services

WHEN is a bribe not a bribe? Apparently, it's when taxpayers' money is used to stop NHS staff blowing the whistle on clinical malpractice and criminal negligence in hospitals.

This week it was revealed that the health service has spent more than £2 million on 52 secret severance deals containing strict gagging clauses to prevent disgruntled ex-employees speaking out.

And these payments are only the tip of the iceberg. In March it was revealed that £14.7 million has already been paid to 598 doctors, nurses and managers in part to buy their silence.

The biggest individual bung — so far as we know — went to Gary Walker, who was given £500,000 to go quietly from his job as chief executive of the United Lincolnshire Hospitals Trust.

He was removed from office on trumped-up 'gross professional misconduct' charges after repeatedly raising concerns about patient safety. When he did eventually speak out in public, he was threatened with legal action to recover the money.

At the time, NHS chief executive Sir David Nicholson told the Commons public accounts committee that the payment was a 'one-off' and claimed he didn't know that Mr Walker was a potential whistle-blower.

Nicholson was subsequently forced to revise his evidence when it was revealed that Mr Walker had written to him four years earlier detailing his fears over long waiting lists and cancelled operations.

The latest figures, obtained by Tory MP Steve Barclay under Freedom of Information, also show that the month before Nicholson appeared in front of the committee, two consultants at the North Lincolnshire and Goole Hospitals Trust were paid £300,000 and £265,000 respectively in hush money.

Not for nothing is ex-Communist Nicholson known as the Man With No Shame.

Before being promoted to run the entire NHS, he was the hospital administrator who presided over the deaths of 1,200 patients in Mid-Staffordshire — a scandal which only came to light because of a brave campaign by relatives of the deceased.

When he appeared before the committee again yesterday, Nicholson obstinately continued to resist calls from Barclay and other MPs to stand down.

This is despite a rampant, corrosive culture of bullying, harassment and cover-up in the NHS, which patently isn't confined to Lincolnshire and is almost certainly far more widespread than even these shocking new figures suggest

ENOUGH TO MAKE YOU GAG



by Richard
Littlejohn

Cruelty

Outrageously, 50 trusts have failed to reply to legally-enforceable requests for information about the size of pay-offs made to staff threatening to go public with inconvenient truths.

They include some of the best-known hospitals in the country, including the world-famous Guy's and St Thomas', which is just across the river from Parliament.

What is blindingly obvious is that neglect — and in some instances outright cruelty — resulting in the unnecessary and undignified deaths of patients across the country is being buried beneath barrow-loads of banknotes.

NHS employees who think that the public have a right to know what is going on in our hospitals are first being intimidated into silence and then, if all else fails, given a fat cheque to go away and keep quiet.

Taxpayers' money is being used to prevent taxpayers finding out the truth about how their taxes are being spent and on covering up crimes committed by so-called public servants.

This officially-sponsored code of omerta isn't confined to the health service, either. It is a malignant cancer eating away at all our public services.

Almost 5,000 civil servants and local council staff have been given lucrative severance packages which contain gagging clauses.

Over the past two years the

business and climate change departments between them have signed confidentiality agreements worth over £4million with 95 departing employees.

What has the climate change department got to hide, apart from the fact that 'man-made global warming' is the greatest con-trick the Government has ever pulled?

Between 2005 and 2010, for some unaccountable reason the latest figures available, the number of confidentiality deals agreed by councils soared from 179 to 1,027.

Brighton and Hove, Britain's first Green-controlled council, topped the list, with 123 gagging agreements.

Aren't the Greens supposed to be in favour of 'transparency'? What are they so anxious to cover up?

I refer my honourable friend to the answer I gave earlier in relation to the department for climate change.

Bungled

Commendably, Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt and Communities Secretary Eric Pickles are both trying to combat the use of public money to buy the silence of whistle-blowers in their departments.

But I fear they are swimming against a toxic tide.

Gagging NHS managers and Town Hall dissidents is simply part of a much wider, more sinister conspiracy against free speech and freedom of information in Britain.

As the State pries ever more intrusively into our lives, it is going to unprecedented lengths to shield itself from scrutiny.

I hesitate to raise the 'L' word at this stage, lest readers

turn the page in droves. But the Leveson Report poses a grave danger not just to the Press but to the right of every single citizen of this country to know what goes on behind closed doors.

Nowhere has the free flow of information been stauncher more dramatically than between the police and the Press — and by extension the wider public.

The Met Commissioner Bernard Hyphen-Howe has effectively criminalised all contact between his officers and crime reporters. Leveson has decreed that whistle-blowers should talk to their bosses, not to journalists.

But the fact is that most whistle-blowers only go to the Press when their concerns are ignored by their superiors.

If the Leveson/Hyphen-Howe protocol had been in force a few years ago, we'd never have known about a whole raft of Scotland Yard scandals, from corrupt cop Ali Dizaei to the bungled investigation into the murder of black teenager Stephen Lawrence. Stephen's killers would still be at large.

Officers who talk to the Press are being charged with 'misconduct in public office'. One senior policewoman has been jailed because she rang the News of the World to complain that anti-terrorist officers were being switched to the phone-hacking inquiry. In the wake of the Woolwich murder of Drummer Lee Rigby, who could claim that phone call wasn't in the public interest?

No money changed hands in that case but a further 100 people have been arrested by officers from Operation Elveden investigating illegal payments

anyone's guilt or innocence. However, consider this: if it is a crime for journalists to pay officials for information in the public interest, then why is it perfectly OK for the NHS and other public bodies to use our money to bribe public servants to suppress information?

I'd have thought that in cases where criminal offences may have been committed, anyone using taxpayers' money to cover up those possible crimes could be accused of conspiring to pervert the course of justice.

At the very least, isn't an NHS manager who spends public money to silence a whistle-blower about to expose criminal negligence guilty of 'misconduct in public office'?

Silence

Since 50 hospital trusts haven't complied with Freedom of Information requests, shouldn't this now be a matter for the police?

After all, they have spent tens of thousands of man hours sifting through journalists' emails *trawling for evidence* of wrongdoing.

Maybe they should start with Sir David Nicholson. He's ultimately responsible for the NHS accounts.

Why don't they kick down his front door at dawn, rifle through his wife's laundry basket and confiscate his computers to discover exactly how much he knew about this misuse of public money?

Jeremy Hunt has already ordered a criminal investigation into the Mid-Staffordshire scandal. Earlier this week he told the Commons: 'No one is above the law of the land.'

In which case, he should extend that inquiry to include the millions of pounds of public money paid to staff to buy their silence.

Whichever way you dress it up — as a wad of cash in a brown envelope or a 'special severance payment' with a confidentiality clause — a bribe is a bribe is a bribe.