

1 London Bridge Street
London SE1 9GF
Email: letters@thetimes.co.uk



Medical examiners

Sir, We fail to understand why the health secretary has said nothing about the role of medical examiners in his statement on implementing the recommendations of the Francis report ("Hunt to protect NHS whistleblowers", Feb 12).

The report backed the introduction of independent medical examiners to scrutinise all deaths not referred to a coroner. Medical examiners would work closely with families to answer questions and address their concerns about the death of a loved one. The report also suggested that guidance should be provided for hospital staff encouraging them to raise their concerns with the medical examiner.

If an independent medical examiner had been in post, we think that cases of poor care and neglect at Mid Staffordshire would have been spotted earlier, avoiding the needless suffering of hundreds of patients.

Medical examiners were proposed in the 2009 Coroner and Justice Act, and pilot schemes have demonstrated improved patient care, reduced harm and financial savings, particularly by reducing the number of litigation cases. If we really want to improve patient safety, this valuable medical role should be introduced without delay.

DR SUZY LISHMAN
President, Royal College
of Pathologists