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# Scandal-hit hospitals paid millions in NHS bonuses

Doctors where patients and babies died due to poor care received 'clinical excellence' awards

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DOCTORS at two scandal-hit hospital trusts were handed millions of pounds in bonuses for "clinical excellence", research has uncovered.

Consultants at Mid Staffordshire and Morecambe Bay NHS trusts were handed hundreds of bonuses worth potentially more than £7 million, campaigners have learnt.

The payments, part of a bonus regime introduced by ministers in 2003, were intended to reward good treatment but came at a time when patients died at the trusts' hospitals owing to poor care and weak leadership, reports have found.

Between 2005 and 2012, at least 259

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*'As patients were being subjected to inhumane treatment, these trusts saw fit to dish out huge bonuses'*

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Clinical Excellence Awards were given to staff at University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay NHS Trust. Awards were typically £10,000-15,000, with the total bill coming to £3.95 million.

Between 2006 and 2010, at least 170 such awards were given to staff at Mid Staffordshire NHS Trust. The trust was unable to provide a final total. However, if the national average value of £18,860 were applied, the total cost would be £3.2 million, said the Taxpayers' Alliance, which compiled the research using the Freedom of Information Act.

The Clinical Excellence Awards, the NHS's version of performance bonuses, are given out to "recognise and reward NHS consultants and academic GPs who perform 'over and above' the standard expected of their role. Awards are given for quality and excellence, acknowledging exceptional personal contributions," the NHS states.

The awards to Morecambe Bay Trust came at a time when a "lethal mix" of failures at a "seriously dysfunctional" maternity unit at Furness General Hospital resulted in the deaths of 11 babies and

one mother. A subsequent report found failings "at every level", with substandard clinical competence, poor working relationships and an attempt by midwives to cover up failings.

At Stafford Hospital, run by Mid Staffordshire Trust, between 400 and 1,200 people may have died due to "appalling standards of care" the Francis report concluded.

It found overstretched and poorly trained nurses who turned off equipment because they did not know how to work it, newly qualified doctors left to care for patients recovering from surgery at night, patients left for hours in soiled bed-clothes and reception staff expected to judge how serious the cases of patients at Accident and Emergency were.

The report concluded that doctors focused on minor cases rather than serious illnesses to meet four-hour waiting targets and win Foundation Trust status.

The trust has since been broken up. University Hospitals of North Midlands NHS Trust, which took on Stafford Hospital, was asked to comment, but failed to reply. Morecambe Bay Trust declined to comment, saying it had been unable to verify the Taxpayers' Alliance figures.

NHS England said it was a matter for individual trusts.

Jonathan Isaby, the director of the Taxpayers' Alliance, said: "It's shocking that, as patients were being subjected to inhumane treatment at the hands of some staff, these trusts saw fit to dish out huge bonuses for supposed excellence.

"Public inquiries have been scathing of the scandalous care at these hospitals, and the awarding of cash rewards for staff shows that priorities were seriously mixed up. The Government must take a very close look at this scheme and ensure that taxpayers' money never gets wasted on bonuses for staff while patients are suffering."

Some 318 Clinical Excellence Awards were handed out in 2012, the most recent year for which figures are available. They ranged in value from £75,796 to £2,957.

Once awarded, the merit payments effectively become permanent additions to doctors' salaries. They come up for renewal every five years, but only a minority lose them. Critics have labelled them a "grave train".