

Health service still victimising whistleblowers

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Not one NHS whistleblower has been given a new job in the health service a year after a government promise to protect staff who expose poor care.

Campaigners say there has been “no evident, meaningful change” in the NHS victimisation of whistleblowers despite promises to end their “truly shocking” treatment.

According to 15 senior figures writing to *The Times* today, no manager has been disciplined for silencing whistleblowers and hospitals have appointed weak managers to those new posts that are meant to protect staff.

Signatories to the letter include Steve Bolsin, who was driven out of the country after exposing the Bristol heart scandal, Kim Holt, who exposed staff shortages at a clinic which missed the abuse of Baby P, and Julie Bailey, who helped to uncover the Mid Staffs scandal. They say that Jeremy Hunt, the health secretary, has failed to persuade NHS bosses to change at a time when the service is focused on a cash crisis.

In a review ordered by Mr Hunt, Sir Robert Francis concluded that staff were deterred from speaking up by a “climate of fear” in the NHS. Sir Robert said “failure to speak up can cost lives” as he urged changes including a scheme to get victimised staff back to work and whistleblowing “guardians” in each hospital. In response, Mr Hunt promised to “call time on bullying and victimisation” in the NHS.

However, today’s letter says a year later “not a single sacked whistleblower has been found comparable re-employment”. Hospitals have appointed internal candidates without the independence to protect whistleblowers to local “guardian” roles, while the national whistleblowing guardian is a tokenistic part-term appointment.

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