

Letters to the Editor



Whistleblowers 'may still be fired'

Sir, In 2009 the Care Quality Commission (CQC) replaced the Healthcare Commission, which uncovered the grave care failings at Mid Staffs. CQC failures to detect poor care and governance followed. For instance, in 2014 the CQC inspection of Southern Health NHS Foundation trust cost £273,908 but failed to spot hundreds of uninvestigated deaths.

The CQC protests that it has no powers to investigate individual cases. Many patients, bereaved relatives and whistleblowers are deeply frustrated that disclosures to the CQC have not resulted in change. On the contrary, if NHS staff whistleblow they may still be fired, gagged and blacklisted. The CQC has done little to deter gagging, despite having been advised to do so by Sir Robert Francis, QC.

The CQC is poor value, and it is time to move on from the current model of regulation. What is vital is a safely resourced, truly independent investigation facility for learning from serious failures. The government is establishing a Healthcare Safety Investigation Branch that will carry out only 30 investigations a year. It may be able to withhold information from patients and families. This defeats the purpose. More radical changes are needed if NHS safety is to improve.

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