

# Hospital treating sick baby is kept secret

Sean O'Neill Chief Reporter

An NHS trust caring for a dangerously ill baby boy has won a blanket anonymity order to protect its staff from the “appalling behaviour” experienced by medics who treated Charlie Gard at Great Ormond Street Hospital.

The trust, which is graded by NHS watchdogs as “requiring improvement”, says it is not seeking to avoid proper scrutiny of its clinicians’ conduct in caring for the baby — referred to as AA — who it says has a “terrible prognosis”.

Instead, managers say they want to protect their staff from the death

threats, abusive messages and “very significant harassment” directed at those treating 11-month-old Charlie Gard who died in July. A campaign by his parents to take him abroad for experimental treatment attracted widespread attention.

The trust was seeking permission from the family court to withdraw life support from AA, who is severely brain-damaged. It also asked for a reporting restriction order that pre-empted and prevented any public comment on the case. That order also prohibits publication of any picture of the child on any website, a move which could prevent his mother — who is not taking any

legal action — posting his picture on social media.

The anonymity order was granted last month by Mr Justice Moor, who rejected arguments from journalists who said the public had a right to know the identity of hospital authorities in such rare cases.

The court heard that AA was born seven weeks prematurely, had been on life support since birth and had suffered severe brain damage. The hospital said the boy’s condition was untreatable and would lead to his early death.

A senior hospital manager said the boy’s mother and family “appear to have lost confidence in the ability of the

treating team to provide medical care to the child to the best of our ability”.

He added: “I am also concerned that the family do not appear fully to trust the truth or accuracy of the clinical information which has been provided to them concerning the very poor state of the child’s health and the fact that the child has severe life-limiting conditions which no clinician is able to treat.”

The manager said he was seeking extensive reporting restrictions despite the fact that “the case has received no publicity”. He said, however, that he was “anxious to do everything I can to ensure that the very difficult conditions in which our staff are presently operat-

ing are not made worse by harassment from members of the public who only learn about the details of the case from the newspapers and respond in a wholly inappropriate manner”.

Ian Murray of the Society of Editors said he was concerned that the order was another example of creeping secrecy in the courts. “People have to have faith in organisations like health trusts and the best way to do that is to allow public debate over important issues,” he said. “Of course people should not be trolled or subject to abuse, but there are laws to deal with that. Society should use those laws rather than throw a veil of secrecy over these issues.”