

The NHS must not punish staff who speak out

SIR - The article by the former cancer surgeon Professor J Meirion Thomas (Comment, April 24) details his shocking treatment at the hands of the medical authorities.

There are repeated examples of the medical establishment closing ranks to protect itself. It is therefore quite correct that whistleblowers should be protected. Not only should non-disclosure agreements be prohibited, but the incentive to sign them - the payment of financial settlements - must be forbidden without the approval of the Secretary of State for Health. NHS organisations must be prevented from using taxpayers' money to remove staff who wish to improve medical care by speaking out.

Nigel Dyson

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SIR - Both your Tuesday headline ("Gag order ban for NHS staff who blow whistle", April 23) and your Leading Article ("A transparent NHS") highlight important issues regarding the way NHS services are delivered.

NHS managers and politicians are

poles apart in their vision of what should be delivered and how it should be done. Politicians want quantity, not necessarily quality, to convince voters that services are being delivered. Trust managers cannot be seen to be providing poor or dangerous services as they might risk their jobs or see a trust put into special measures.

This means that as long as some service can be delivered - regardless of the quality of that service - then the problem will continue.

Dr PL Riley (retd)

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SIR - When I joined the NHS from the private sector, I was warned that it was the most ruthless and competitive organisation in Britain.

The problem is that its "customers" are ministers and the Department of Health - not patients.

Far too many NHS managers have a single measure of success: namely, meeting political targets - in any way they can.

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