From the Permanent Secretary
Clive Gowdy CB

Department of
Health, Social Services
and Public Safety

An Roinn
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agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí

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Mr Alan Bremner
Controller of Programmes
UTV
Havelock House
Ormeau Road,
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Dear Alan,

We spoke following the transmission of "The Issue" programme on 25 March. I am now writing formally to record my concern at the way in which this programme was handled and at the unacceptable treatment of my Chief Medical Officer, Dr Henrietta Campbell.

In the discussions with the Department's Information Office prior to the programme the Editor of the programme, Trevor Birney, assured Kevin Mulhern that in interviewing the Chief Medical Officer, UTV were not holding her accountable and that any criticisms were not aimed at her. Kevin explained the role of the CMO and made Trevor aware of the messages which the CMO wanted to get across. Trevor indicated that he was content with this approach and assured Kevin that the CMO was not the target of the programme.

Unfortunately, this was not borne out by the way in which the programme was handled. An openly bullying and intimidating approach was adopted by the interviewer and it became evident that Dr Campbell was indeed the target for blame. Dr Campbell was offering her full and voluntary cooperation in the making of the programme and there was no need for such hostile and aggressive questioning. I therefore can only conclude that the programme set out to pin the blame on someone and, as Dr Campbell was the only person prepared to come into the studio, she would do.

Moreover, I have to express my concern at the interviewer's unwillingness to allow Dr Campbell to answer questions properly. This undermined any possibility of an objective consideration of the tragic circumstances surrounding Lucy Crawford's death. The repeated interruptions and the aggressive interviewing style unfortunately did not allow Dr Campbell to fully explain the lessons learnt and the steps being taken to ensure such a tragedy never happens again. This acted against the public interest and was completely unacceptable.

I have to say that, having watched the interview a number of times, it is clear that the interviewer failed to understand the role of the Chief Medical Officer and her relationship with the rest of the medical profession. She is neither legally nor clinically accountable for the death of Lucy Crawford, nor for the actions of individual doctors or consultants. To seek to make her accountable in the line of questioning used was to give a false impression to the public and did a great disservice to a distinguished and respected professional.

I must express my deep disappointment at the treatment accorded to Dr Campbell. The discourtesy shown to her was in complete contrast to her openness and willingness to appear on the programme. She re-scheduled a number of important meetings, yet on arrival in UTV no effort was made by the presenter or the producer to make her feel welcome or at ease in the studio.

I believe her treatment was completely unacceptable. As a result, our trust and confidence in the team that produces this programme has been seriously undermined. I accept that the media have a role to challenge officials and to draw the facts out for the public, but the way in which this interview was conducted was improper and inappropriate and you will appreciate that we will need to have a reassurance about the treatment of officials before we would be prepared to put anyone else forward for interview on this programme.

I trust you will carefully consider the issues I have raised.

Yours sincerely,

Dan Gowdy.

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