

**Young, Christine**

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**From:** Mulhern, Kevin  
**Sent:** 20 May 2004 15:30  
**To:** Gowdy, Clive; Campbell, Dr Henrietta; McCarthy, Miriam  
**Subject:** IMPARTIAL REPORTER STORY THIS WEEK

**20/05/04**

## **Minister to answer questions on Lucy**

Health Minister Angela Smith has agreed to be interviewed about the death of Lucy Crawford, the baby who died as a result of mistakes at the Erne Hospital over four years ago. The Minister is now taking a personal interest in the case, and has agreed to answer questions from the Impartial Reporter in an interview to take place at the beginning of June.

Lucy Crawford, the 17-month-old daughter of Neville and Mae Crawford from [REDACTED] was admitted to the Erne Hospital in April 2000 with a tummy bug, but within hours died as a result of "fundamental errors" at the hospital. These errors have never been fully explained, and it took almost four years before an inquest found that the true cause of the little girl's death was the hospital's blunder in mismanaging her drip. In the months following Lucy's death, the Sperrin Lakeland Trust held an internal review which has proved to be nothing more than a whitewash. In an interview published in this newspaper in April, the Chief Executive of the Trust, Mr Hugh Mills finally accepted his organisation's culpability. Yet, not only has his organisation still not issued a proper apology to the Crawford family, answers are still not forthcoming about how and why the incident could have happened.

This morning, the Trust meets at Coleshill in Enniskillen to discuss clinical and social care. However, although the organisation lists openness and accountability in its mission statement, it is not known if Lucy Crawford's case is being discussed.

Indeed, no details of any discussion the Trust Board has ever had about Lucy Crawford have ever been made public. The case has highlighted major concerns about the Trust's complaints procedure.

As the Trust meets this morning, the news that the Minister is taking a personal interest in the case is likely to put pressure on the Trust to come up with answers for a public which is increasingly sceptical about their management.

The Minister herself will have to consider the whole issue of accountability in the health service. Despite the fact that this family has suffered such a personal tragedy, nobody in this apparently monolithic organisation has been held to account; from the medical team responsible right through to the highest level.

The Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland, Dr Henrietta Campbell did agree to be interviewed on television in March, but appeared to contradict the Coroner's findings at one point. Her officials have since denied that was her intention.

At the beginning of April, this newspaper contacted the press office of the Health Minister to request an interview. Initially, we were told that Ms Smith's diary was extremely busy and a statement was issued, which we believed did not answer the public's questions. However, as public concern grew, we persisted in a series of requests for an interview. Last Friday, the door to the Minister appeared to be firmly shut when an official told us that the Minister "could not spare the time" to undertake an interview.

But on Monday, there appeared to be an 11th hour change of heart, when we were contacted by a senior official who said that the Minister would give an interview.



It is clear that this is a story which will not, indeed cannot, be allowed to go away.

29/04/04

## 'Watchdog' body to look at Lucy's case

**The death of 17-month-old Lucy Crawford as a result of errors in her treatment at the Erne Hospital is being investigated by the Western Health and Social Services Council.** Described as a "watchdog" organisation, it was the intervention of the Council's former chief officer, Stanley Millar, which finally led to an inquest on Lucy. However, at the Council's monthly meeting in Irvinestown views were expressed that it was a watchdog that could bark but had no bite; it had neither power nor authority and simply operated in an advisory capacity. The 24-member Council is appointed by the Health Minister and includes individuals with an interest in health issues and 10 district councillors, among them Fermanagh's Harold Andrews, of the Ulster Unionists, and Paddy Gilgunn, of Sinn Féin. Lucy's death was on the agenda for last Thursday's meeting but when Mr. Millar's successor, Maggie Reilly, arrived late, she and the chairman, Raymond Rogan, went into the corridor and had a short discussion. Immediately on his return the chairman advised members that since the agenda was drawn up "circumstances have developed that would make it inappropriate" to discuss the matter. "In future there will be a full report on what has transpired," he promised. After the meeting he was asked what had prompted the decision not to discuss Lucy's death. He replied: "All the issues had not been resolved. Until they are it's very difficult for us to have a discussion. It would serve no useful purpose to discuss this issue until we were aware of all the facts." Mrs. Reilly explained that following Lucy's inquest she had been contacted by the chief executive of the Sperrin Health Trust, Hugh Mills, representing management at the Erne Hospital. He had offered to appraise her of the situation. "We had a fairly full and frank meeting. We were able to raise a number of issues and concerns," said Mrs. Reilly. She is seeking a meeting with the Chief Medical Officer for Northern Ireland, Dr. Henreitta Campbell, and the Western Health and Social Services Board. "It's part of the process of us being informed. There's a number of people we have to talk to," she said. She would also like to meet Lucy's parents, Neville and Mae Crawford. "I'm very conscious of the fact that we are talking about their child," Mrs. Reilly stated. Commenting on the issues she said there was an obligation on the Trust, where there has been a major incident, to explain the background, what led to the child's death, how the Trust responded and what has been learned to ensure it does not happen again. "We have to ensure this never, never happens again," she stressed. She said the Council was struck by the fact that there had been no obligation to report such incidents to the Chief Medical Officer. Members thought that if major incidents and "near misses" were reported the Department of Health would have an overview and be able to spot any problems. She expressed the Council's concern about the way the Crawford family was dealt with. "The family instinctively felt there was something wrong. That concern must be respected by both the medical profession and the management of the health services and must be dealt with promptly and appropriately. There's quite a bit to be learned from that," she added. Mrs. Reilly said that far too often parents are not listened to when they express concerns about their child's care. In this particular case: "The lack of understanding and humanity about the parents' anxiety left a lot to be desired, from my understanding. I think that has to change. I think there has to be a major learning point in all of this." She wants to see a situation whereby, when there is a major incident, such as the death of a child, there is "full and open and honest discussion with the most senior care provider at the time. I think that just has to be a standard. I think that's the standard we should expect." She said that when parents raised a concern about the care of their child during treatment or particularly after a death, the most senior clinician involved must make themselves available to the parents and appraise them of what is going to happen and involve them in the review of the case and give them a voice in that review. Mrs. Reilly said that unfortunately the culture of litigation instilled a fear "that just closes the shutters down." She said most parents were not thinking of litigation, they just wanted answers, even if the answer was: "I don't know, but we are doing our bit to find out and will keep you appraised to the best of our ability." She pointed out that exclusion and secrecy just added to the distress. Later in the meeting, while discussing another issue, Mrs. Reilly said there was a public misconception about what the Council could do. She said it had neither power nor authority. "The only power we do have is to raise the issue within the public arena," she stated. "Do the public even know we exist," she wondered. She said there needed to be a debate about the need for a watchdog organisation. The vice-chairman, Paddy McGowan, said: "We are described and seen by the Department as an advisory body." Mrs. Reilly agreed: "At the end of the day that's what we are." She said that public expectations had grown dramatically and at some point the Council had to match that expectation. According to the Health and Personal Social Services web site the Councils are: "independent consumer organisations" with "a duty to represent the public's views and interests, to review the work of health and social services and to recommend any improvements needed." The Council plans to discuss Lucy's death at its next monthly meeting which is scheduled for May 27, at the Library Headquarters in Omagh.

## Hospital source attacks Coroner



**A senior figure at the Erne Hospital has launched an astonishing attack on the Coroner's handling of the inquest of Lucy Crawford, the 17-month-old [REDACTED] girl who died in the Erne Hospital four years ago.** An inquest held by Coroner John Leckey in February found that "fundamental errors" by the hospital led directly to the death of the little girl. An internal review by the Sperrin Lakeland Trust failed to pick up on the mistakes, and recently in this newspaper, the Chief Executive, Hugh Mills reluctantly admitted they were responsible for the death of Lucy, daughter of Neville and Mae Crawford. But with public interest and concern over the case being extremely high, a senior medical source at the Erne has attacked the Coroner in a letter to the Impartial Reporter. "He is answerable to nobody save the Almighty. This does not mean he is infallible," says the medical source. The letter criticising the Coroner was sent by a senior medical source at the Erne Hospital with no direct connection with Lucy's case. Hiding behind anonymity, the source disingenuously described himself as a "Concerned ex-reader". But in a covering letter insisting his name is not published, he is revealed as a senior figure at the Erne. He maintains the first he knew of the case was when he saw television reports of the inquest; however, he goes on to criticise the Coroner's findings in detail and says the media was "primed for the inquest." What is particularly significant about the letter is the attack on the Coroner. In our judicial process, the Coroner is a widely respected independent figure. In Lucy Crawford's case, he called in medical experts including Dr Edward Sumner, an eminent physician and a former anaesthetist at the world-renowned Great Ormond Street Hospital in London. Yet, the Erne Hospital source casts doubts on such opinion. "He (the Coroner) thus condemned the Erne Hospital in 2004 on the basis of scientific evidence and medical protocols regarding fluid replacement that were either not known or not widely known at the time of Lucy's death." This statement goes against Dr. Sumner's opinion. The Erne Hospital source also refers to the Coroner's motive as: "The Belfast Coroner apparently felt he had a point to make." In addition, there appears to be an accusation of collusion with the media, ending with the assertion that "in short it was a set up." In a specific reference to the Impartial Reporter, the letter writer attempts to intimidate the newspaper with the message "back off". While the source makes it clear that these are his personal views, there must be concern that there is denial that anything went wrong at the hospital over Lucy's death. The source said it was not a "simple equation" of "wrong fluid at wrong rate equals tragic death." This is a theme among critics of the media reporting this case. In addition to the Erne Hospital source, the Trust, hospital campaigner Dianne Ruckchati and even the Chief Medical Officer, Dr Henrietta Campbell all refer to medical knowledge at the time. In a recent television interview, Dr. Campbell spoke about the deaths of Lucy and Raychel Ferguson. She said: "The rarity in these two events was the abnormal reaction which is seen in a very few children to the normal application of fluids." None of the media critics appear to address the issue of the management of fluid in Lucy's case. There appears to be widespread denial of the true nature of the mistakes made; therefore, it seems pertinent to ask how seriously we can take the assertion that lessons have been learned. There is also the assertion that criticism of the handling of Lucy's treatment and the systematic failure thereafter is somehow a criticism of the hospital as a whole, and its staff. Apart from the fact that this is untrue, and has been made clear by both this newspaper and the Crawford family, such paranoia cannot justify sweeping this case under the carpet. Last week, the Crawford family received a letter from Dr. Henrietta Campbell. Despite the fact that the letter arrived during the week of the anniversary of Lucy's death, there is no expression of sympathy. The letter, brief to the point of being almost terse, does not indicate that Dr. Campbell wishes to meet them but says she is prepared to do so if the Crawfords think it would be useful. Many serious questions remain about what exactly happened to Lucy Crawford, how the Sperrin Lakeland Trust failed to uncover the truth about an untoward death, and how the system allowed them to keep it to themselves. The Trust Board meets in Omagh this morning, and Lucy's death is not on the agenda. However, there is an "in camera" session at the end when the press and public will be excluded. In a similar closed session at their meeting in March, a note shows "LC inquest" was discussed. This afternoon, the Western Health and Social Services Council is meeting in Irvinestown. This body has the responsibility of representing the general public in a role which monitors the work of the Trust. Item nine on the Council's agenda simply says "Meeting with Mr. Hugh Mills re LC." In addition, the Impartial Reporter put in a second request last Friday for an interview with Health Minister, Angela Smith on the subject. No reply had been received by the time of going to press yesterday (Wednesday) afternoon. But despite the threats of hospital campaigners and Erne Hospital sources, it seems unlikely that the press and media will back off from the serious issue of accountability.