

no resignations, no proper answers,

Trust: we ki

• Exclusive: by Denzil McDaniel

The Chief Executive of the organisation which manages the Erne Hospital says his Health Trust now accepts responsibility for the death of 17-month-old Lucy Crawford.

It has taken four years, but effectively he is admitting that bungling by the Enniskillen hospital killed the baby by pumping far too much of the wrong fluid into the little girl. Lucy was admitted suffering from gastroenteritis, but literally fatal errors resulted in her death.

Parents, Mae and Neville Crawford, from Station Road, Letterbreen were, naturally, devastated by the little girl's death in April 2000. Compounding their agony was the fact that they felt frustrated by authority at every turn in their bid to find out why she died.

It has emerged that her death was not only preventable, but it was fundamental errors in her treatment that directly led to her death.

But it wasn't until this week that the man with overall responsibility for the running of the hospital gave a clear indication that they were culpable.

In an exclusive interview with the Impartial Reporter, Mr Hugh Mills, Chief Executive of the Sperrin Lakeland Trust was questioned about the now discredited internal review of the case. Initially, the review heard a consultant's opinion that he could not give an absolute explanation as to why Lucy's condition deteriorated rapidly.

It was only when a Coroner's inquest in February heard another expert's opinion that the real cause of Lucy's death was revealed to the public. That a wrong dose of the wrong fluid was dripped into Lucy.

I asked Mr Mills: "Is the Trust now

prepared to acknowledge that they were responsible for Lucy's death?"

Mr Mills said: "We have done that in litigation."

Question: "No, you have said you were not contesting liability which falls far short. Are you now acknowledging that the Trust is responsible for Lucy's death?"

Mr. Mills: "Yes. In the context of the full picture of medical knowledge at the time."

Question: "You're saying the hospital killed that child?"

Mr. Mills: "That's an emotive way to put it, you are looking for a headline...." Significantly, though, Mr. Mills did not contradict my interpretation.

I also asked him if the Trust would now apologise to the Crawford family. He claimed that a letter of apology had already been sent to the family.

However, I pointed out that the family and many others believed what was said in the letter fell well short of an apology.

"A full apology was the intention," insisted the Chief Executive.

I asked Mr Mills: "The intention of the letter was to say, 'we're sorry for causing Lucy's death'?"

Mr Mills agreed.

The admission of liability and apology is a major step; but it is likely to be too little too late for the Crawford family. Indeed, they do not accept that the letter from Mr Mills was an apology.

The letter this month, after the inquest, said: "I am writing on behalf of the Trust to indicate our regret and apologies for the failings in our service at the time of Lucy's death in April 2000."

Neville Crawford said this week: "We have been to hell and back a mil-

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Despite everything that is now emerging, there are serious doubts if anybody will be held accountable for Lucy Crawford's death. No member of the medical and nursing team which directly caused her death has faced disciplinary action. No doctor was suspended pending the investigation, and the man in overall charge of the case, Dr Jarleth O'Donohue refused to take the stand (as he was legally entitled to do) to answer questions at the inquest.

Nobody in management is being held accountable, even though an

internal review "did not suggest that the care provided to Lucy was inadequate or of poor quality."

Mr Mills made it clear in the interview this week that he did not intend to resign.

For their part, the Crawford family feel that the comments by Mr. Mills this week mark some limited progress. But they feel many questions remain about what exactly went wrong on the fateful night of April 12, 2000, why the Trust did not investigate it more thoroughly, and why they have had to battle so hard and still have not received answers.

The case highlights a question mark over the system of accountability in this country. Serious issues remain unresolved.

SAFE

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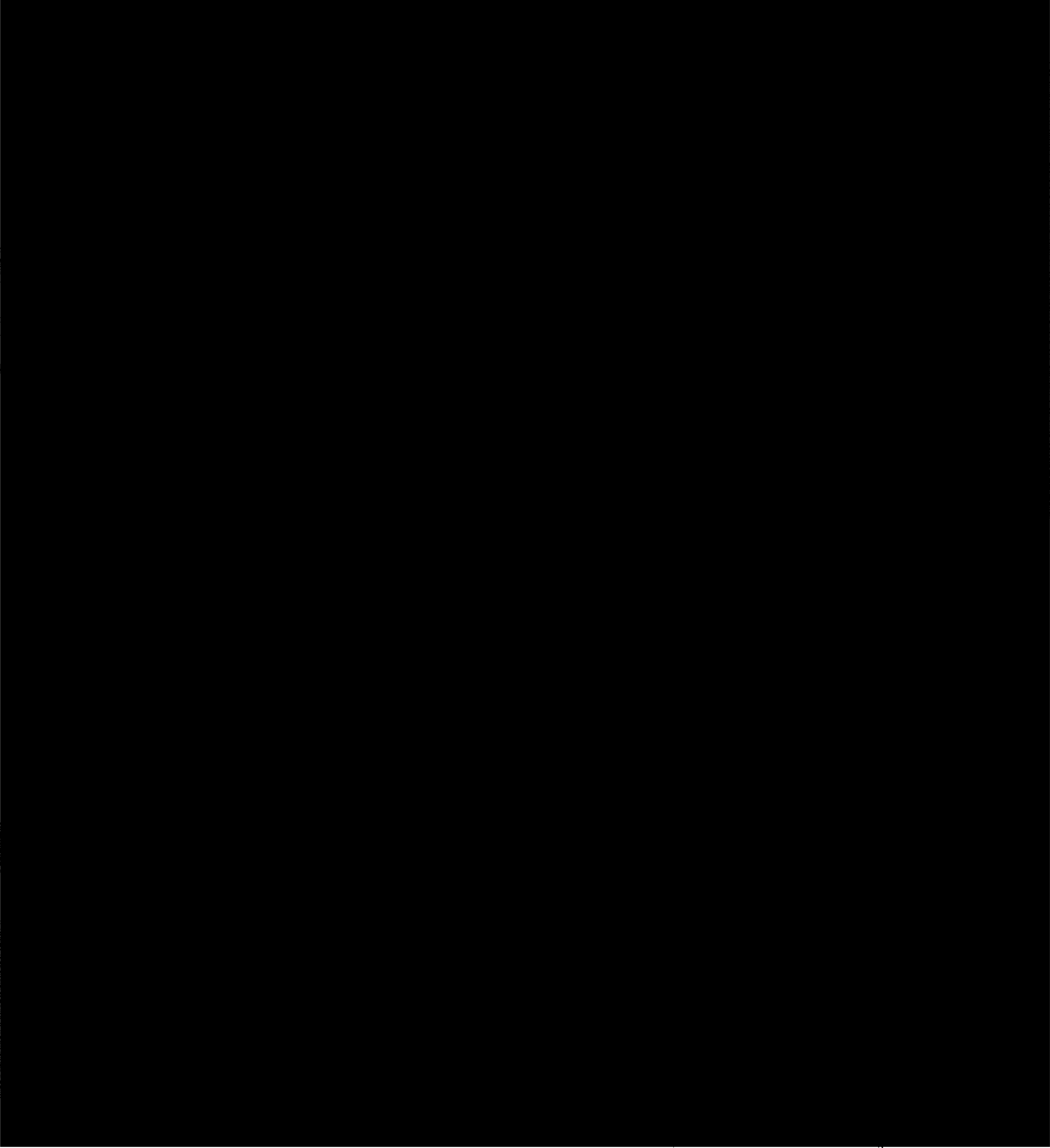
Chris received the award as journalist of the year at the prestigious IPR awards in Belfast on Friday night.

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and after four LONG years...

Killed Lucy



anger to us all; Coroner's concern