

Young, Christine

From: Moore, Martin
Sent: 11 November 2004 09:59
To: Campbell, Dr Henrietta; Gowdy, Clive; Maguire, Philip; McCarthy, Miriam; Baxter, Clare; Edgar, Leona; Owens, Ambrose; Lindsay, Sharon; 'colm.shannon'
Subject: New Crawford Impartial Reporter story - 11.11.04

Health body calls for public inquiry into Lucy case

A health watchdog has called for a public inquiry into the death of 17-month-old Lucy Crawford to provide some relief for her family, restore public confidence and address the apparent lack of accountability in the Health Service. Earlier this year an inquest found that Lucy died as a result of errors in her drip treatment at the Erne Hospital in April 2000.

Last week Health Minister Angela Smith announced an inquiry into Lucy's death and the deaths of two other children in similar circumstances. The health watchdog, the Western Health and Social Services Council, says the inquiry should be open and transparent and be able to call upon all of the key people involved in looking after Lucy and the two other children.

Council chairman Paddy McGowan said: "These families live with an enduring burden of grief and powerlessness which neither time nor compensation could eradicate. We can only guess at the terrible effects that these untimely deaths have had on the families.

"This inquiry therefore must be open and transparent and it must be bound by a time frame which is reasonable in which to work and reach conclusions. It must be able to call on all of the key people involved in the care of the children and all others who had a responsibility to protect these and future children in the planning and delivery of care.

"To that end we call on the Minister to make this a full, public, independent inquiry and in light of the families' concerns we would further call upon the Minister to appoint an independent chairman from outside the jurisdiction," said Mr. McGowan.

"The families must have the right to be heard not only as witnesses but also in the shaping of this inquiry. They must be supported to participate in a way that is meaningful to them," he added.

"The public, whose confidence has been severely dented, must observe a process which restores that lost confidence and fully addresses the apparent lack of accountability in the Health Service," said Mr. McGowan.

He was speaking after watching the UTV Insight programme, "When Hospitals Kill", which investigated the children's deaths.

"We are deeply concerned about the medical and care issues raised in the programme and the very disturbing allegations that there was a 'cover-up'," he added.

In June Mr. McGowan and the Council's chief officer, Maggie Reilly, met with representatives from the management of the Erne Hospital including the current acting medical director, Dr. Diana Cody; the chief executive of the Sperrin Lakeland Trust, Hugh Mills; and Trust chairman, Harry Mullan.

He met to discuss the reasons why the Western Health and Social Services Council had declined the invitation

to participate in the Trust's internal review of the events leading to the death of Lucy Crawford," explained Mr. McGowan.

"Our main concerns and objections at that time centred on what was, in our opinion, the very narrow focus of the review, the absence of independent medical expertise and the fact that there was a lack of openness and transparency in the review process. We clearly stated at that time that we would be more confident if the Trust and the Department had instigated a full and independent review of all of the issues relating to the death of Lucy Crawford and the subsequent handling of the parents' right to know what had happened to their daughter.

"We concluded that meeting by saying that as an independent body concerned with matters of public interest that we would reserve the right to comment publicly on the outcome of their completed review," Mr. McGowan stated.

He welcomed the Health Minister's announcement of an independent inquiry, led by Mr. John O'Hara, QC, into the issues and allegations raised by the Insight programme.

"We welcome the intervention of the Minister as an important first step. We would also want to acknowledge the sensitivity shown by the Minister in informing the families concerned of her intentions before making a public announcement. However, as of today we do not know how this inquiry will be taken forward either in its scope or terms of reference," said Mr. McGowan.

"As a body charged with representing the public interest in health matters and in listening to and reflecting public concern we would strongly urge the Minister to ensure that the scope of the inquiry is sufficiently wide to encompass all of the issues raised both by ourselves and the Insight programme," he added.

Mr McGowan concluded by saying: "The outcome of this inquiry one can only hope will give some relief to the families in the knowledge that whilst nothing will ever return their children to them, that the lessons learnt and changes implemented will mean that no other family should ever have to go through this again."