

Vulnerable patients abused at privately run hospital

By a Unison member

In a shocking exposé of Winterbourne View 'hospital' near Bristol, owned by Castlebeck, an undercover Panorama reporter Joe Casey filmed people with learning disabilities and autism being systematically abused by staff.

The first few minutes would have left viewers feeling numb, but towards the end one resident's sickening treatment over a day was correctly described as 'torture' by her distressed parents.

What unfolded was a daily culture of bullying, intimidation and violence perpetrated by a core group of unqualified staff devoid of any compassion for or understanding of the vulnerable people they worked with. These staff deliberately created situations of conflict and then abused patients into submission, particularly through the inappropriate use of physical restraint.

The fact that this has been exposed was only made possible by a nurse Terry Bryan who has risked his career by approaching Panorama. This alone is a testament to the failure of all the safeguards in health and social care that are meant to protect

vulnerable people.

Terry approached his own management twice, and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) three times. According to a CQC statement, an unnamed local authority was asked by them in December to organise a safeguarding meeting to investigate Terry's complaints, but a first meeting was only held in February with little obviously happening in the intervening period.

Because Winterbourne View is a therapeutic and assessment facility, trained staff should have been working in a sensitive and patient manner with residents supervised by nurses and management. Instead volatile individuals were recruited, residents were warehoused during the day in a lounge with few activities, paperwork was falsified, and nurses stood by as abuse took place.

Serious questions also have to be asked about why, following the CQC's request for a safeguarding meeting, professional Independent Mental Capacity Advocates were not appointed for each resident. One resident had alerted her parents to the abuse but was thought to be exaggerating. One visit by a trained advocate would have raised enough

concerns for the immediate involvement of the police.

Clearly there is huge anger towards the 13 staff who have been suspended, nine of whom have been arrested. But there is a danger that a witch-hunt through the right wing press and social media sites could lead to vigilantism and deflect attention from the systemic failures exposed by Panorama.

Following the programme, the CQC has deservedly come in for stinging criticism. It has since carried out three unannounced inspections at Winterbourne View, stopped further admissions, started an immediate review of services run by Castlebeck, launched an internal investigation into its own actions, and apologised to Terry and offered to discuss his concerns. The CQC has now announced inspections of a 'sample' of 150 hospitals similar to Winterbourne View.

But what CQC's senior management have not said is that their own frontline inspectors, many of whom are threatened with redundancy, did find in December 2009 that at Winterbourne View there was no clear record of staff training or if it took place, and no annual update training in de-escalation and physi-



cal intervention techniques.

Castlebeck is owned by a Jersey-based investment vehicle called Lydian Capital, which is backed by a group of Irish business tycoons led by JP McManus, John Magnier and Dermot Desmond.

With private equity sharks and the profit motive now running through parts of health and social care like a stick of Blackpool rock, can we be confident there are no more Winterbourne Views? No!

Southern Cross bankruptcy – see page 5

NHS: Lansley must resign!

'Were I Andrew Lansley, I would resign over this issue,' claimed Mike Hancock, Lib Dem MP for Portsmouth South, when presented with a 'Save Our NHS' petition by local anti-cuts campaigners, health workers and trade unionists.

But Hancock, who chaired the committee which scrutinised the government's bill to cut and privatisate the National Health Service, was unable to answer why the health secretary of his government had failed to consult the public during the recent 'listening exercise' and was presented with evidence that the original consultancy process had been stage-managed to avoid dissent from health workers.

The campaigners also demanded a full public inquiry into Andrew Lansley's connections to the private health companies which stand to profit from the proposed bill.

While Hancock wished to distance himself from the bill, and the policies of his government, he is no politician of principle; having achieved a rare political hat trick of having defected from Labour to the Social Democratic Party to form the Liberal Democrats. Then, following the last general election, he was the first Lib Dem MP to appear on national news to praise the coalition agreement with the Conservatives.

The NHS campaigners are following up the lobby of Mike Hancock with plans to present the petition to Tory MPs Penny Mordaunt of Portsmouth North and Caroline Dinenage of Gosport. This activity will be part of the build up to launching a new 'Save Our NHS Portsmouth' campaign, backed by the city's trades union council, to stand against all spending cuts and privatisation of the National Health Service.

Campaign Launch Meeting: Thursday 23 June, Portsmouth Central Library, 7.30pm
More info: SaveourNHSportsmouth@gmail.com

Ben Norman
Portsmouth Socialist Party

'Slutwalk' protests Fighting back against sexism and discrimination

'Yes means yes! No means no! Whatever we wear, wherever we go!' was the chant as women and men took to the streets of Newcastle on 4 June in a lively 'slutwalk' protest.

The demo's placards, such as 'My clothes aren't my consent' were an expression of the anger felt.

Newcastle's 'slutwalk' organiser, Lizi Gray, explained that she had seen an article in the Guardian. Initially she'd thought the name a bit strange, but when she had read the background, about a Toronto police officer saying that to avoid rape women should stop dressing like sluts, she decided something needed to be done in Newcastle to highlight the sexism.

The Newcastle demo, like those staged in other cities worldwide, encouraged any gender to participate. Young men joined in with the chants, and one held a banner declaring: 'Another man against rape.'

Pete Redpath, a PCS young members network officer (speaking in a personal capacity), said he hadn't known about the protest until four days ago, but immediately agreed to come along. Pete commented: 'Here's



On the Newcastle protest photo E.Brunskill

a thought - why not blame the rapist?'

Many of the young people on the demo will be questioning why sexism and discrimination are an inescapable aspect of

capitalist society. Protests such as this, uniting young men and women, can lead to a search for an alternative - a socialist alternative.

Elaine Brunskill

Cardiff march

About 250 angry women of all ages and also a good number of men gathered in Cardiff to march against the myth that rape is caused by what women wear.

The demonstrators were also incensed that justice minister Ken Clarke has implied that some forms of rape are 'less serious'.

Unfortunately, the rally at the

end of the march was non-political; expressing the anger about how women are treated but not explaining why. Also, the impact of the government's cuts on vital services in our communities and on much-needed services for women was not mentioned.

Socialists will continue to explain to a new generation of women that the capitalist sys-

tem causes the oppression of women and also to fight for a socialist society free from sexism and inequality.

The next Socialist Party Women's meeting in Wales is on 5 July in Cardiff - 'It doesn't have to be like this - why sexism is not 'natural''. Call 029 2044 0571 for more details.

Katrine Williams

Fast news

A 'good dictatorship'

While pro-democracy opponents of Bahrain's monarchy languish in the country's notorious police cells, F1 boss Bernie Ecclestone (23rd richest person in the UK) has given the green light to restage the cancelled Bahrain grand prix later this year.

This should come as no surprise from a man who once said: 'A good dictator is better for a country than a democracy.'

'Good' is not a term that applies to Bahrain's despots. The feudal monarchy of the al-Khalifa family has crushed internal dissent using 1,200 Saudi soldiers.

Anyone deemed a conspirator has been 'disappeared' into windowless police dungeons. Some dissenters face ludicrous show trials, charged with crimes that carry the death penalty. Many have been persecuted and driven out of the country by the Sunni ruling class, who are now increasing sectarian repression against the country's Shia majority population. Shia protesters who attended pro-democracy rallies before the regime's crackdown in March are now considered by the monarchy to be 'treasonous pawns' of Iran's rulers.

So why has Ecclestone reinstated the grand prix? 'Nothing to do with money,' he says. But it has. The re-staged event will guarantee F1 its \$40 million fee from the Bahrain government.

A few F1 drivers have voiced concerns about holding the event in a violently dictatorial country. None of the racing teams were in favour of going back to Bahrain, but only because of personal safety concerns and the lengthening of the race season.

Simon Carter

Pensions opt-out

The Treasury expects tens of thousands of low paid public sector workers to opt out of their pension schemes if the government increases their contributions.

If this happens then it will be a spectacular own goal for the government as the so-called pensions gap between money being paid into the schemes and money paid out will widen as fewer people contribute.

The Treasury contends that staying in the schemes would be 'economically rational'. But not when most public sector workers face a third year of pay freezes while inflation is running at 5%. In fact, having to stump up more money, for additional years, and then to receive a lower pension is completely irrational!

Fuel not food

As soaring world food prices drive millions more people into absolute poverty and increase hunger, more and more agricultural land, especially in Africa, is being used to produce profitable biofuel crops. Some of the biggest culprits are UK companies.

And biofuels are far from being the 'green alternative' to fossil based fuels. In fact, the destruction of forests to clear land for planting such crops actually increases the release of carbon emissions into the atmosphere.

According to the Institute of European Environmental Policy carbon released from deforestation linked to biofuels could exceed carbon savings by 35% in 2011 rising to 60% in 2018.