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 under-cover Panorama reporter Joe Casey filmed disturbing scenes of wounding disabilities and autism being systematically abused.

The first few minutes would have left viewers feeling numb, but to watch moment after moment of 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 amounts 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 due to Terry Bryan who has risked his career by approaching Panorama. Terry approached his own management twice, and the Care Qualification 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, violent individuals were retrained, residents were warehoused were recreated in the day in a location 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 and wanted her child to be evacuated. One visit by a trained advocate would have raised enough concerns for the immediate involve ment of the police.

Clearly there is huge anger towards the ward 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 could lead to vigilantism and deflect attention away from systemic failures exposed by Panorama.

Following the programme, the CQC’s senior management were asked to respond to Terry’s 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 all of Castlebeck’s homes similar to Winterbourne View.

But what CQC’s senior management have not said is that their own frontline inspectors, many of whom were threatened with redundancy, had fired the CQC’s attention in December that there was no discrepancy at Winterbourne View.

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

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

Elaine Brunskul

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 and could lead to pension gaps between money being paid into the schemes and money being paid out to younger people.

The TUC believes 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 retire, their pension is completely irrational!

Fuel not food

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

The UK government’s report, ‘Biorefinery Potential Assessment,’ claims that 60% biofuels could exceed carbon release from deforestation linked to biofuels could exceed carbon savings by 35% in 2011 rising to 60% in 2018.

NHS Lansley must resign!

“They erred. I err, so Lansley erred over this issue”, claimed Mike Hancock, Lib Dem MP for Portsmouth South, when questioned by 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 privatised 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 consultation process had been stage-managed to avoid dissent from health workers.

The campaigners also demanded a full public inquiry into Andrew Lansley’s connection 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 Liberal Democrats. Then, following the last general election, he was the first Lib Dem MP to appear on national news to praise the coalition government, he is no politician of principle; having achieved a rare political hat trick of having defected from Labour to 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 government.

The NHS campaigners are following up the erred by Hancock with plans to present the petition to Tony MPP’s Penny Mordaunt of Portsmouth North and Caroline Pidgeon’s office to be a 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: SaveNHSPortsmouth@gmail.com

Ben Norman

Portsmouth Socialist Party

‘Slutwalk’ protests

Fighting back against sexism and discrimination

“Yes we 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 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, was an encouragement for 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 official (speaking in a personal capacity) has had a 100-page drab worn in the UK in the past two years.

“Women have false beliefs. 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 system 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.

On the Newcastle protest photo E.Brunskill

A ‘good dictatorship’

While pro-democracy opponents of Bahrain’s monarchy languish in the country’s notorious police cells, F1 boss Bernie Ecclestone (Grand Prix Committee 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 democracy than a democracy.”

“Dictatorship is a witch-hunt that applies to Bahrain’s despots. The feudal monarchy of the al-Khalifa family has no intention of installing even a facade of democracy, as seen in the state’s attempt to ‘disappear’ 2,100 Saudi soldiers. Anyone deemed a conspirator has been ‘disappeared’ into windowless police dungeons. Some dissenters face floggings, 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. Many health workers who attended pro-democracy rallies before the regime’s crackdown in March are now being held without charge to be ‘treasonous pawns’ of Iran’s regime.”

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 dictator-controlled country, but 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

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Richard Damphousse