

Nursing Practice

COMMENT

“An honest culture is enough to protect both patients and staff”

The discovery and investigation of patient abuse in Mid Staffordshire has made this a critical time for the NHS. Action is needed to prevent this from happening again. One recommendation of the Francis report is that a duty of candour is made law. The government has started with an institutional duty of candour in last week's response, but has hinted individual duty of candour could be on the cards. Being open and honest is no longer enough. Truthfulness and transparency must be reinforced.

Under this duty, anyone coming to harm through healthcare would have to be told what happened, regardless of whether a complaint had been made. Trusts would have to report the truth to the public. Nurses would have to highlight dangerous conditions and expose poor practice.

To secure such a culture of transparency, communication has to be sincere and honest. Improving relationships between professional groups and across hierarchies is vital. Too often nurses, doctors and other groups close ranks and do not collaborate. This transfers to the bedside – leaving the patient in the dark.

Errors could no longer be concealed by omission of fact. Breaching the duty of candour would be a criminal offence. Disciplinary measures are likely to increase if poor practice is exposed. Litigation against trusts would also increase. What protection would there be for nurses who spoke candidly?

When a defendant stands up in court and swears to tell “the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth”, they are being judged on their candour as well as

their crime. Cooperation with investigations is taken into account during sentencing. Candid witnesses are also protected so they can give their testimony. Anonymous reporting could provide such protection for whistleblowers.

But support must be in place for those with the humility and the courage to admit they were wrong, if lessons are to be learnt.

If cutting red tape is the priority, a duty of candour should not be made law. The burden of caring is heavy enough. Instead, improve openness and fairness in the NHS. Show people that if you are genuinely transparent you have nothing to hide and nothing to fear. Being open and honest is part of the Nursing and Midwifery Council code and much has been done to secure truthfulness in safety reporting.

The changes that the duty of candour would bring might seem necessary in the wake of the Francis report. Better communication of problems could have saved lives. Routine reporting of errors can only have a positive effect in a no-blame culture. **NT**

Samuel Holden is clinical research nurse, Guy's and St Thomas' Foundation Trust



SPEAKOUTSAFELY

While we acknowledge Mr Holden's concerns about a duty of candour, *Nursing Times* believes it is essential for an open NHS. Such a duty would apply to all NHS employees so would protect frontline staff who raise concerns from bullying and will compel management to respond. Sign our petition at tinyurl.com/NTSOS-petition

HIGHLIGHTS

Can response systems improve learning? *p20*

Using volunteers to meet non-clinical needs *p14*

Patient engagement through enhanced recovery *p24*



SPOTLIGHT

Too simplistic to run hospitals as car factories

You would be excused for thinking the car industry has little to tell healthcare providers. But Toyota's lean philosophy is increasingly influencing UK healthcare.

Its core principle is that any activity that does not create value for the customer should be eliminated. This may seem reasonable – who could argue against eliminating any activity that is not focused on safe, high-quality care?

But, while lean has its supporters in healthcare, our review on page 16 argues that the approach is unsuitable. The problem is that lean looks at systems to produce lots of identical cars. Healthcare deals with individuals, and what constitutes high-quality care for one might be unacceptable – or even dangerous – for another.

If the NHS is to become truly patient centred, it must beware any philosophy that assumes they are all the same.



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