

# The crime of being callous



GETTY

## Readers panel

Will making 'wilful neglect' of patients a criminal offence improve patient safety?



### Stop pandering to tabloids and pressure groups

Part of the government's response to the Francis report and other high-profile NHS investigations is to make 'wilful neglect' of patients a criminal offence.

This headline-grabbing response is fraught with problems. What will 'wilful neglect' entail, and who will be prosecuted? Nurses and doctors on the wards? Managers? Or the trust chief executive? It could be a legal minefield.

Health secretary Jeremy Hunt wants more transparency in the NHS, but this proposal could create the exact opposite. If a nurse makes a clinical error, will fear of prosecution compel them to keep quiet? Or will they be too scared to speak out about a colleague's poor performance if they think they may be responsible for that person being charged with 'wilful neglect'?

Better protection for whistleblowers and ensuring there are enough staff on wards are more important. I wish politicians would listen to people who work in the NHS, rather than pandering to tabloids and pressure groups.

*Drew Payne is a community staff nurse in north London*



### Much depends on how 'wilful' will be determined

There is no excuse for any healthcare professional to compromise patient safety, and if an individual deliberately causes harm through their actions they must be held to account.

However, there are many factors involved when harm is caused to a patient, and whether this proposal will improve patient safety or not remains to be seen. A lot will depend on the circumstances that led to safety being compromised, and how it will be determined that the neglect was 'wilful'.

## The role of nutrition is critical in clinical care

### A good hospital diet is beneficial for patients and for the NHS purse, says Andy Jones

The Hospital Caterers Association has long been campaigning for greater acknowledgement of the role good nutrition plays in patient recovery.

All members of the clinical team, from ward to board, need to understand that good food is the simplest form of medicine, and is as integral to patient care as any medication or treatment.

There is evidence to show the benefits of good nutrition on improving clinical

outcomes; a more personalised approach to nutritional care improves patient wellbeing, aids recovery, and helps reduce the risk of pressure ulcers. It can also accelerate discharge from hospital and reduce readmission rates, helping to meet targets on reducing NHS costs.

These should be strong persuading factors for chief executives to give greater support to hospital food services, and raise catering budgets. Although some organisations are making great headway in these areas, recognition of the benefits of investing in nutritional care and food services is still lacking in many others.

Liz Evans, chair of the National Nurses Nutrition Group, is leading

the way by championing food as an integral part of a patient's recovery plan. All nurses should take this message on board, and help us to ensure that the importance of providing good food for hospital patients has even stronger resonance at government and board level.

As Christmas approaches, there could not be a better time to remind people of the importance of this issue. Surely those who are unwell enough to have to spend Christmas in hospital deserve decent food too? Not only on this day, but all year round.

**Andy Jones is chair of the Hospital Caterers Association**