



New patient safety requirement for trusts after Gosport scandal

By **Nick Carding** 22 November 2018

NHS trusts must report annually on how they have dealt with staff concerns over patient safety, under new legislation proposed by the Department of Health and Social Care.

Health and social care secretary Matt Hancock also told Parliament his department wanted to “strengthen” protection for whistleblowers and indicated this could include changing the law.

The proposals form part of the government’s response to the Gosport Independent Panel’s inquiry, which found more than 450 patients died from inappropriate prescribing of drugs at Gosport War Memorial Hospital during the 1990s and early 2000s.

Mr Hancock did not provide further details about the new reporting requirements, and documents published by the DHSC, said it would be subject to “parliamentary time”.

Other measures Mr Hancock put forward include the CQC reviewing how it regulates duty of candour, which requires trusts to be open and honest with patients over healthcare failings.

Last month, charity Action Against Medical Accidents told HSJ its analysis suggested the CQC “can’t be relied upon” to ensure compliance with duty of candour.

NHS England will also review the role of “controlled drug accountable officers, who ensure safe practices are in place for prescribing and administering drugs”.

Mr Hancock said: “The reforms we plan to make will mean greater transparency, stricter control of drugs, and a full and thorough investigation of every hospital death.

“Taken together it means that warning signs will be spotted earlier and examined at the time, not 25 years later.”

Sarah Wollaston, Conservative MP and chair of the health and social care select committee, said it was important that trusts which reported a high number of staff concerns should “not be penalised”, as this may indicate they have introduced the “necessary culture change”.

Mr Hancock said the number of complaints would not be a “material factor”.

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He also said the introduction of medical examiners across England would ensure every death was “scrutinised”.

In April, HSJ reported the final implementation of this scheme would be a much watered down version of the one initially proposed more than a decade ago. The scheme will be rolled out from next April.

Responding to Mr Hancock’s comments, shadow health secretary Jonathan Ashworth said medical examiners should be based in local authorities, rather than NHS acute trusts, to safeguard their independence – and have their remit extended to primary, community, and mental healthcare.

Meanwhile, an independent police team is assessing whether to launch a full investigation into the Gosport deaths. Hampshire Constabulary investigated the goings-on at the hospital three times but no criminal charges were brought.

To find out more about the Patient Safety Congress

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