

Behind closed doors—'whistleblowers' need voice over care home concerns, says charity

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(Medical Xpress)—'Whistleblowers' who expose mistreatment of vulnerable patients within the care home system need to be confident that their allegations will be treated seriously, a national charity has said.

The Ann Craft Trust, based at The University of Nottingham, has called for a more supportive approach for those who speak out on [abuse](#) to allow them to voice concerns without fear that they will not be treated seriously or, worse, it could even lead to them becoming victimised themselves.

The charity has conducted its own research project, Blowing the Whistle on Abuse of Adults with Learning Disabilities, which worryingly revealed that many of those who had spoken out about abuse would not do so again because their experience had been too traumatic.

The comments by the charity, which is committed to safeguarding [disabled children](#) and vulnerable adults against abuse, follow a BBC Panorama programme that revealed that some of the patients who were abused at the Winterbourne View [care home](#) have continued to be mistreated after being moved to other care facilities.

Catalogue of abuse

Deborah Kitson, Chief Executive of the Ann Craft Trust, said: "Too often we hear from whistleblowers about the negative aspects

experienced by them when they have raised concerns. Apart from frequently not being taken seriously, they also recounted being ostracised by their work colleagues, receiving no support from the organisation or their managers and being left with no assurance that they had acted appropriately."

Six workers were jailed on Friday for abusing patients at the now closed hospital near Bristol, while a further 11 former support workers were convicted at Bristol Crown Court for the ill-treatment and neglect of patients.

The abuse came to light in 2011, when an undercover Panorama reporter secretly filmed support workers carrying out a catalogue of abuse, including slapping patients, pinning them under chairs and administering cold showers as punishment.

The latest programme revealed that at least 19 of the 51 former Winterbourne View patients have been issued with safeguarding alerts since they were moved to other care homes, according to NHS figures obtained by the BBC.

'Behind closed doors'

Ms Kitson added: "The situation at Winterbourne View once again revealed that so often what goes on behind closed doors does not reflect the practice that is aspired to in policy and emphasises the importance of channels to raise concerns and assurance that concerns will be listened to and acted upon.

"There has been much discussion, quite rightly, about the failure in this case to listen to the 'whistleblower'—if their concerns had been acted upon promptly these practices would not have been inflicted on the victims over a prolonged period of time and the perpetrators would have

been removed from working with vulnerable people.

"It is time that we recognised that to raise a concern about the people we work with may be the hardest thing that we have to do and that we, as well as those involved, need support and reassurance. We have to confront this issue if we hope to find out what really goes on behind closed doors."

More information: A copy of the research report for Blowing the Whistle on Abuse of Adults with Learning Disabilities can be ordered via the charity's [website](#).

Provided by University of Nottingham

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