

British medics could face jail for patient neglect

November 17 2013

British doctors and nurses who neglect their patients could be jailed under government proposals announced Saturday, in the wake of a scandal at a hospital where hundreds died after receiving appalling care.

Wilful neglect of patients is set to be made a [criminal offence](#) under reforms being introduced in the wake of the scandal at Stafford Hospital in central England, where up to 1,200 people died as a result of poor care between 2005 and 2009.

A three-year public inquiry into the scandal heard horrifying examples of abuse and neglect, including patients left starving and soiled in their beds, or so thirsty that they drank water from vases.

Prime Minister David Cameron said health workers who mistreated and abused patients would face "the full force of the law" in a package of reforms to be unveiled next week.

The new offence will be modelled on the [wilful neglect](#) of adults under Britain's Mental Capacity Act, which is punishable by up to five years in prison.

The health ministry is set to hold a public consultation on appropriate sentencing for the new offence.

Cameron said Britain was "full of brilliant doctors, nurses and other [health workers](#) who dedicate their lives to caring for our loved ones".

"But Mid-Staffordshire hospital showed that sometimes the standard of care is not good enough."

He added: "Never again will we allow substandard care, cruelty or neglect to go unnoticed and unpunished."

But the British Medical Association said medics could be less likely to speak out against their colleagues if they thought it could lead to them going to jail.

"They don't need this new climate of fear," Andrew Collier, co-chairman of the BMA's junior doctors' committee, told BBC television.

"What they need to do is learn from their mistakes and develop their practice."

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