Panorama whistleblower blames managers for care home brutality

Exclusive by Colin Parish

The nurse who blew the whistle on a brutal regime at a care home exposed by the BBC’s Panorama programme says poor recruitment processes, weak management and inadequate training were to blame.

Terry Bryan, a learning disability nurse with 30 years’ experience, explained his decision to approach the BBC about Winterbourne View residential hospital in Bristol after his complaints to managers were ignored.

His actions led to Panorama broadcasting footage of vulnerable adults being abused at the home.

Mr Bryan, who worked at Winterbourne View for three months, told Nursing Standard: ‘My immediate impression was the chaos, noise, and the lack of activities – no one was doing anything with the patients.

‘The healthcare support workers had bad attitudes and the nurses did not do anything about it.’

Physical cruelty

Although Mr Bryan instigated the undercover investigation, he was shocked when he saw Panorama’s footage because he had not witnessed physical cruelty at the care home. His complaint had been about the negative attitudes of staff and the lack of a suitable regime for the patients.

‘If I had seen any cruel behaviour, I would have stopped it,’ he said.

He told Nursing Standard that staff at Winterbourne View branded him a ‘do-gooder’ because he did not share their attitudes.

Mr Bryan complained to the management, but his demands for action were ignored. Eventually he contacted the Care Quality Commission (CQC), but after it too failed to act, he turned to the BBC.

Mr Bryan, who no longer works as a nurse, said he doubted that better training or regulation of healthcare support workers would have helped the situation.

He added: ‘You should not have to train support workers not to harm people. You have to blame the people who were doing the recruiting.

Accountability

‘The people in management should be accountable for what goes on in their units. The regulator cannot possibly monitor every hospital.

There has to be a certain amount of trust that providers are going to maintain standards,’

A CQC spokesperson said: ‘We recognise that had we contacted Mr Bryan directly after we received his email, we would have been alerted to the seriousness of the situation.’

A Winterbourne View spokesperson said that its managing company, Castlebeck, has ordered an external review that is expected to report by the end of the month.

Castlebeck has also established a whistleblowing phoneline for its 2,100 employees.

TRUST TO BALLOT STAFF ON WORKING FOR FREE

Unions have reacted angrily to a hospital’s plan to ask nurses to work six unpaid days a year.

Kettering General Hospital NHS Foundation Trust in Northamptonshire is expected to ballot its staff this week on losing half a day’s pay per month. Managers claim the two-year measure would save the trust up to £2.7 million.

In a memo to staff, a trust spokesperson said redundancies, increased car parking charges and cuts in overtime pay could be introduced if the pay proposal is rejected.

RCN and Unison have urged nurses not to vote and were seeking meetings with the hospital’s management this week.

RCN East Midlands operational manager Cliff Edwards said: ‘The trust is effectively giving staff an ultimatum: take a pay cut or you or your colleagues will be made redundant, you will not be recognised for becoming more skilled, and the pressure to deliver high quality patient care will be even greater than it is now.’

A trust spokesperson said a wide variety of cost-cutting measures is being considered and that the trust has consulted with unions on the plans.

‘The survey is being held to determine the general staff attitude towards this proposal and its alternatives,’ he said.