Letby case underlines need for robust support for those raising concerns about care

The government says there will be an inquiry into the circumstances surrounding the horrific crimes of Lucy Letby at the Countess of Chester Hospital. It will look into concerns about how complaints raised by clinicians were handled and is intended to provide the families with the answers they deserve.

However, as we went to press there were calls for the inquiry to have more powers. Among them health service ombudsman Rob Behrens has called for a full statutory inquiry which will require managers to give evidence.

The case has sent shock waves around the country and the implications for the NHS in terms of governance are profound.

But we have been here before. There was the Clothier report into the crimes of Beverly Allitt, who was responsible for killing four and harming nine others at Grantham and Kesteven Hospital in Lincolnshire in 1991. The inquiry into issues surrounding her crimes uncovered management failures, inadequate staffing levels and highlighted delays in the removal of her from the children’s ward.

While that was specific to the care of children, there have been others, most notably the Francis inquiry of 2013 into the failures of care at Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust and the Shipman inquiry 2002-05.

Many questions arise from the Lucy Letby case and an inquiry could take years.

As children’s and neonatal nurses you go to work everyday with the motivation to do your best for the young and vulnerable babies and children in your care. That is beyond doubt, as is the fact that you also need support when raising concerns about the standard of care that is being provided and if you decide to blow the whistle.

The Neonatal Nurses Association is offering support to any of you who have been affected by this case (news, page 6).

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