



PRESS RELEASE – for immediate release Monday, 17th March 2014

"COVER UPS" ADD INSULT TO INJURY IN NORTHERN IRELAND EMERGENCY PRESSURES SCANDAL

Action against Medical Accidents ('AvMA' - the UK charity for patient safety and justice) has written to Northern Ireland Health Minister, Edwin Poots, calling for an independent urgent review of patient safety in Northern Ireland and the introduction of a statutory 'Duty of Candour'. The move comes following unprecedented pressures on the emergency department of the Royal Victoria Hospital Belfast, which have resulted in several potentially avoidable deaths. Following a BBC Spotlight programme in February 2014, it emerged that the circumstances of some of these deaths, which had been the subject of internal investigations which found serious failings in care, had not been shared with families. AvMA is currently supporting the family of 86 year old Charlie Patterson who died in January 2013. An investigation into his death found a catalogue of failings which even resulted in a 'safety and quality learning letter' issued by the Health and Social Care Board to all hospitals in Northern Ireland. However, the first the family heard about it was over a year later, after the BBC Spotlight programme had revealed that pressures at the Royal Victoria Hospital had resulted in a number of potentially avoidable deaths.

Peter Walsh, chief executive of AvMA said:

"The family feel let down, upset and angry. There could not be a clearer example of why a legal Duty of Candour is needed in Northern Ireland. This lack of openness with patients and families must not be tolerated and those responsible should be held to account. As things stand, a hospital is not breaking any statutory law, rule or regulation in withholding information of this kind".

AvMA has been leading a campaign for a statutory Duty of Candour - a legal obligation to be open and honest with families when things go wrong and cause harm. This was also a recommendation of the Francis Inquiry into Mid Staffordshire. The Department of Health in England has agreed to introduce a Duty of Candour this year, but Northern Ireland and other parts of the UK have so far refused to do this.

BBC Spotlight is covering the latest developments in this story in Northern Ireland on Tuesday, 18th March 10.35 pm on BBC1 Northern Ireland.

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