

PE1568/N

Scotland Patients Association Email of 24 September 2015

Petition 01568 by Catherine Hughes on the NHS Centre of Integrative Care.

As chair of the Scotland Patients Association, I write in full support of the above petition. The responses from health boards are totally inadequate, I'd think insultingly dismissive of the committee's efforts. The Lothian Health Board letter even has serious mistakes in it. That is not the way to treat the Scottish Parliament surely.

I think these chief executives need to be called before the committee to account for themselves fully. Can you please do that?

Overall, this is a scandalous situation showing blatant discrimination against patients who choose any NHS alternative to mainstream, drug centred treatments, despite the NHS and Scottish Government saying they are committed to patient choice. How to enforce discrimination? A health board simply forbids patients to attend the NHS hospital or clinics of their choice. Patients and the public can protest all they like, as 80 per cent did in the Lanarkshire "consultation" mentioned - but they will still be shoved aside and a health board's minority will overrule.

Is this the way a health service should behave in a democracy? Something has gone wrong, seriously.

For many years, the Scotland Patients Association has heard repeated praise of the CIC from patients, saying treatment there had changed their lives, some going as far as saying their lives had been saved from despair and suicidal intentions. So why harm something good which patients support overwhelmingly?

With many, "choice" is necessary as they've already had bad reactions to mainstream treatments to which they have been forced to return. Some may also feel forced to pay privately even if they can't afford it. Does that square with Scottish Government policy? Does anyone care about any risks of forcing patients outside of NHS protection by highly qualified staff?

What this also reveals is that there is NO PROTECTION for patients and we can forget all the pledges of being "patient centred" and listening to patients and carers. Health Boards will simply ignore what patients say.

And, more disturbingly, Government will let health boards rule - the lack of Government intervention is astonishing in this situation. They seem controlled by the Boards rather than the opposite way round.

In this mess, everyone has forgotten that we, the public, pay for these Boards, for Government and for the many organisations which claim to protect patients.

The responses show, for instance, that the Scottish Health Council, which was set up ten years ago to protect patients, has totally failed to do so in the Lanarkshire health board instance outlined in the petition.

They just agreed with the health board that closing two CIC clinics in Lanarkshire and forbidding patients to go to the CIC hospital in Glasgow was not a major service change. Of course it was. It involved many hundreds of seriously ill people and Lanarkshire's latest letter shows that they will get a poorer service as mainstream can't cope with more than one speciality, so sick people will be forced to travel around. For years, they've had one centre CIC services.

Look at the letter of July this year from the Scottish Health Council referring to some other letter they had sent in November 2014, which I cannot see on your website.

But from the dates it looks like the Lanarkshire Board did not send a report replying to that November 2014 letter until July 2015! It also looks like that was acceptable to the Scottish Health Council that they, as "patient protectors" were ignored.

Just what is going on in health? We need a full investigation. Thank you meantime for what your committee is doing.

Yours faithfully

Margaret Watt
Chairperson
Scotland Patients Association