

Care minister acknowledges system failures during Parliamentary debate on abuse of people with learning disabilities

The abuse and ill-treatment of people with a learning disability in assessment and treatment units like Winterbourne View were debated by MPs last night.

Responding to the House of Commons debate, Care Services Minister Paul Burstow described the abuse of patients at Winterbourne View as “horrifying and depressing”, and acknowledged the need to “look critically at the system that has allowed out-of-area placement to grow to the extent that it has, which has allowed such abuse to go unnoticed in some places for too long.”

Burstow referenced the recent report *Out of Sight*, co-authored by Mencap and The Challenging Behaviour Foundation, which showed that institutional-style services had let people with learning disabilities down. The report argued that there are systemic failures in the care of people with a learning disability and behaviour that challenges.

Paul Burstow said that every part of the system, including NHS and social care commissioners, providers, regulators and health and care professionals, has a part to play.

The House of Commons debate was secured by the Rt Hon Tom Clarke, Labour MP and co-chairman of the all party group on learning disability. He outlined the personal stories of a number of people with a learning disability who had experienced abuse and neglect, both at Winterbourne View and at similar units elsewhere. He said they had been “collectively let down”.

Rt Hon Tom Clarke, Labour MP said:

“It is nothing short of a national scandal that we've allowed people with learning disabilities to be so marginalised and ill treated...The current care model, and the regulation of it, led to these abuses. It is the system that we are challenging.”

Mencap and The Challenging Behaviour Foundation are calling on the Government to urgently address systemic failings in the care of people with a learning disability, by closing large institutions and developing appropriate local services.

The joint report, *Out of Sight*, details a number of serious incidences reported by families, including physical assault, sexual abuse and the overuse of restraint – both physical and in terms of overuse of medication. It also explores the plight of families to have their loved ones moved closer to home. The report can be viewed at <http://www.mencap.org.uk/outofsight>.

A full transcript of last night's House of Commons debate can be found at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201213/cmhansrd/cm120903/debtext/120903-0003.htm#1209041000384>

Notes to editors

For further information, please contact Pasca Lane on the Mencap media team on 020 7696 6017 or email pasca.lane@mencap.org.uk.

- **About Mencap**

There are 1.5 million people with a learning disability in the UK. Mencap works to support people with a learning disability and their families and carers by fighting to change laws and improve services and access to education, employment and leisure facilities. Mencap supports thousands of people with a learning disability to live their lives the way they want.

We are also one of the largest providers of services, information and advice for people with a learning disability across England, Northern Ireland and Wales. People with a learning disability and their carers can find out more about our services by calling Mencap Direct on 0300 333 111 or by visiting www.mencap.org.uk

- **What is a learning disability?**

A learning disability is a reduced intellectual ability and difficulty with everyday activities – for example household tasks, socialising or managing money – which affects someone for their whole life.

People with a learning disability tend to take longer to learn and may need support to develop new skills, understand complex information and interact with other people.

The level of support someone needs depends on individual factors, including the severity of their learning disability.

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation

Behaviour can be described as challenging when it is of such an intensity,

frequency or duration as to threaten the quality of life and/or the physical safety of the individual or others and it is likely to lead to responses that are restrictive,

aversive or result in exclusion.

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation provides information, support and training

around challenging behaviour associated with severe learning disabilities, and

leads the 'Challenging Behaviour National Strategy Group' which seeks to influence policy and practice nationally on behalf of individuals who challenge and their families.

'Severe learning disability' is a developmental disability meaning the individual has a significantly reduced ability to learn new skills. Individuals with severe learning disabilities typically have very limited communication skills, often non verbal, and need help with daily living skills such as eating and dressing. Challenging behaviour shown by individuals with severe learning disabilities may include aggression, self injury, disruptive and destructive

behaviours, stereotyped behaviour, and is most often due to their lack of ability to communicate their needs.

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation was founded in 1997 by Vivien Cooper, parent of a son with severe learning disabilities and behaviour described as challenging. Today the Challenging Behaviour Foundation is in regular contact with over 4500 families and professionals across the UK. There are an estimated 30,000 individuals in England with severe learning disabilities and behaviour described as challenging.

For more information visit www.challengingbehaviour.org.uk or contact:

The Challenging Behaviour Foundation

Email: info@theCBF.org.uk

Telephone: 01634 838739