



Department
of Health

From the Rt Hon Jeremy Hunt MP
Secretary of State for Health

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25 JUN 2014

Dear Kim,

Thank you for writing to me on 3 June and for bringing this very important issue to my attention. I feel very strongly that NHS workers should have the freedom and confidence to speak out on issues of patient care and safety in the knowledge that they will be acted upon. This is a matter that I take extremely seriously and as you may already be aware I recently met with a number of NHS whistleblowers to discuss their own personal experiences having raised concerns within the NHS.

Your letter highlights your concerns about Alder Hey NHS Foundation Trust and I note that a disciplinary hearing has been held by the Trust. I hope that you will understand why it would not be appropriate for my Department to intervene or suspend such hearings, which are arranged in accordance with the Trust's internal policies. Similarly, I hope you understand why it would not be appropriate for the Department to intervene in the Trust's HR practices. Local decisions about the employment of individual NHS staff are a matter between the particular NHS employer and the employee, and in some cases the Employment Tribunal. Ministers cannot seek to overturn due legal process, however, as Health Secretary, I need to be assured that each regulator acts upon its responsibilities and that proper processes are in place to take seriously the substance of "whistleblowing disclosures" made in the public interest to NHS and social care employers or indeed to the regulator itself. On behalf of patients, the Government needs to know that safety concerns are listened to, considered and dealt with as appropriate, and as swiftly as possible.

In view of the serious nature of the comments you make regarding the alleged malpractice by the Trust and the clinical issues of patient safety, I will ask the Care Quality Commission as inspectors, and Monitor as the regulator of Foundation Trusts, to look into these allegations and inform me what actions are being taken.

In addition, as you will be aware from my letter to you of 24 June, I have now outlined a package of measures to ensure the NHS remains one of the safest healthcare systems in the world. Sir Robert Francis QC will lead an independent review to consider what further action is necessary to protect NHS workers who speak out in the public interest and help to create the kind of open culture that is needed to ensure safe care for patients.

We believe it is important that the review hears the voices of those who say they have been harmed and to learn the necessary lessons for the future. Sir Robert's review will look at what further action is necessary to encourage and protect individuals working in the NHS who speak up in the public interest.

I hope that you will be assured that Sir Robert is the ideal person to lead this review following his landmark inquiry into the poor standards of care at Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust, and I would ask you to submit evidence of your whistleblowing experiences and urge Mr Ahmed and other whistleblowers known to you to also submit their own evidence.

Many thanks once again for your proactive interest in these issues, and I look forward to our meeting.

Yours

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jey' with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

JEREMY HUNT