**Reinstate Charlotte Monro**

The dismissal of long standing union rep and health worker Charlotte Monro has repercussions not only for health workers but for all workers, particularly those in the public sector. As her tribunal approaches we are publishing these bulletins in order to promote discussion around some of the issues this case highlights.

**Bulletin No 2**

Shooting the messenger:

Why the bullying of Charlotte Monro is bad for patient care

By Roger Kline

In the NHS as a whole 22% of staff reported they were bullied last year. Bullying is bad for staff and bad for patients since bullied staff are less likely to admit errors and less likely to raise concerns. The treatment of a well regarded OT in a London Trust shows how it can impact on patient care.

A few months ago I met Charlotte Monro, an occupational therapist who had worked for 26 years at Whipps Cross hospital in east London - and for the NHS for ten years before then. She is a highly regarded Occupational Therapist who also happens to be a UNISON representative. Her NHS Trust (Barts) has an enormous PFI debt, and had embarked on widespread cuts, one of which was to merge two stroke wards, losing almost a third of the beds as well as a small specialist gym, essential to help ambulate stroke patients.

Charlotte, as a union rep on behalf of other unions, and therapy and nursing staff on the stroke ward, was asked to explain to the local Waltham Forest Council health scrutiny committee why staff felt this proposal was flawed. Such Scrutiny Committees have a statutory accountability for public health and integrating social services for returning patients to the community. For accepting the invitation Charlotte was subjected to disciplinary action, charged with bringing the trust into disrepute by providing “inaccurate information” and eventually sacked.

The decision to discipline Charlotte for speaking to them was seen as ludicrous by councilors. That charge was eventually abandoned by the Trust but not before they went on a “fishing trip” and eventually “discovered” from 1969 – 1977] (yes – 36 to 44 years ago) conviction for assaulting police and minor convictions dating back to protests back in the 70s, claiming she had never registered them with the Trust. They also brought two other allegations relating to union activity, on one of which she was dismissed. Bizarrely, the Trust now agree she had the right to speak to the scrutiny committee, but it is clear that it was her disclosures that annoyed the Trust.

It is hard to believe that Charlotte would have been dismissed (or even disciplined) if she had not shared the concerns of staff in the department – and users of the service – with the Scrutiny Committee. After all, Charlotte Monro won an award for outstanding service in 2009 and had many years of good industrial relations with managers at Whipps Cross before Whipps Cross joined Barts.

The Trust have turned a long standing loyal member of staff into a victimised whistleblower. There are many wonderful staff at Barts and no doubt plenty of good managers. But Barts staff were less than fulsome in their views on the Trust in the last 2013 national NHS staff survey which suggest Charlotte’s treatment reflects deeper problems. In Barts, a remarkable 29% (almost 3 in 10) of the staff said they were bullied by staff and managers last year.

Barts is in the worst 20% of all NHS Trusts for the proportion of staff:

* who would recommend the trust as a place to work or receive treatment
* who reported experiencing harassment, bullying or abuse from staff in last 12 mths
* who suffered work-related stress in last 12 months
* who experiencing discrimination at work in last 12 months
* who reported job satisfaction

Perhaps most worryingly of all, only 62% of Barts staff said they would feel safe in raising their concerns - well below the national average. Even worse, only 41% of Barts staff said they would feel confident that the organisation would address their concerns.

Charlotte Monro was a senior UNISON rep and shared her colleagues concerns (about the impact of cuts on patients) with those who have a statutory accountability for the impact of such cuts. She was sacked for "serious misconduct". There is a widespread view that she should be hailed as a heroine for doing what her duty of care required her to do? Instead her treatment may well make staff even more fearful of raising concerns

The current review by Sir Robert Francis is recognition of how serious the problem of the treatment of whistleblowers is. Employment Tribunals are not the places to settle patient safety and care concerns. The odds are stacked against those who raise concerns and union representatives. But Charlotte has no choice. Her case starts on 23rd September. Let’s hope the Tribunal takes proper notice of the workplace culture that Charlotte’s treatment is symptomatic of. Bullying is toxic for good patient care. But if Charlotte wins it will be good news for patients at Barts.

**Roger Kline is a Director of Patients First**