



16/02/2012

Submitted on behalf of PACA members.

"Staff doing this work [protecting children] need... persistence and courage"

Lord Laming 2001

"Doctors have a vital part to play in combating the risk of child abuse. Nothing must be done to discourage them in that task".

House of Lords 2005:

We wish to make a submission to the Leveson Inquiry regarding stories that attract a high degree of press attention but subsequently turn out to be false, as we have evidence that such stories have seriously harmed children, especially those who are at risk of child abuse or suffer ill-health.

Our submission concerns press campaigns that have harassed professionals tasked with protecting children or researching serious childhood diseases – the campaigns were subsequently found to be groundless, but in the process have discouraged professionals from engagement in such work.

Our background is as an organization established less than 10 years ago in response to high profile cases against paediatricians at the General Medical Council. These cases were brought by those who sought to discredit professionals involved in child abuse work and research. The media gave extensive publicity to individuals who claimed that they had been falsely accused of abusing their children, or to those who were trying to claim compensation for alleged harm incurred to their children as a result of failures in the conduct of research.

The professionals involved were vilified in the press, suspended from their work, underwent disciplinary hearings and were damaged both professionally and personally. When the cases were dismissed or overturned in the Higher Courts, the press did little to repair the damage. But in the meantime, professionals became less willing to engage in child protection work and research. The real victims therefore were the children, whose voice was never heard by the press.

Professionals are familiar with parents who make false claims, but the media does not appear to be so familiar. The media must learn that allegations made by parents against professionals should be verified without reliance solely on the parents' stories. The press, in failing to present the whole truth, does injustice to the children who were abused and to children who have conditions needing research.

Our evidence is highlighted in the articles from the medical literature which will be forwarded tomorrow. We sincerely hope that our evidence is accepted, for the sake of vulnerable children.

Yours faithfully,

A rectangular box with a thin black border, used to redact the signature of John Bridson.

John Bridson

List of references of papers providing evidence of the damage press campaigns.

1. Dyer C. Southall is cleared of serious professional misconduct. *BMJ* 2011;343:d6314 doi: 10.1136/bmj.d6314
2. Chadwick DL, Krous HF, Runyan DK. Meadow, Southall and the General Medical Council of the United Kingdom. *Pediatrics* 2006;117;2247-51.
3. Jenny C. The intimidation of British pediatricians. *Pediatrics* 2007;119: 797-799.
4. Williams C. United Kingdom General Medical Council fails child protection. *Pediatrics* 2007;119: 800-802.
5. Dyer C. GMC is tougher on child protection doctors than on those who access child porn conference hears. *BMJ* 2010;341:c6562.
6. PACA Press Release: Failure of Medical Regulation - time for an inquiry into the integrity of the GMC after David Southall's appeal win. 10th May 2010.
7. ADCS Press Release. Child protection vacancies in the NHS rising fast. 21st October 2011.
8. An investigation into the nature and impact of complaints made against paediatricians involved in child protection procedures. RCPCH 2007.
9. Bridson J. The GMC should be investigated over its Southall and Meadow hearings. *BMJ* 2011; 343: 6708d.
10. Hey E, Chalmers I. Investigating allegations of research misconduct: the vital need for due process. *BMJ* 2000; 321: 1-8.
11. Hey E. The 1996 Continuous Negative Extrathoracic Pressure (CNEP) trial: were parents' allegations of research fraud fraudulent? *Pediatrics* 2006;117;2244-2246
12. The Stoke CNEP Saga. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine* 2010. Includes: Gornall J. The role of the media in the Stoke CNEP saga. *JRSM* 2010;103:1-5
13. Modi N, McIntosh N. The effect of the neonatal Continuous Negative Extrathoracic Pressure (CNEP) trial enquiries on research in the UK. *Archives of Disease in Childhood* 2011; 96: 500-504.

Statement of Truth

I believe the facts stated in this witness statement are true.

Signed 

Date 18/02/2012