

PACA Press Release 06/10/11

Call for Independent Inquiry into GMC Decisions in High Profile Child Protection Cases

PACA welcomes the result of the latest Fitness to Practise Hearing, which found David Southall not guilty of serious professional misconduct. Given the evidence, we would question how the allegations ever reached a hearing, although the same applies to the earlier matters examined in FtP Hearings in 2004, 2006, 2007 and 2008.

We are seriously concerned as to how the GMC repeatedly alleged charges of serious professional misconduct against David Southall in the above hearings, and against Roy Meadow in 2005. Both Professors of Paediatrics were experts in Fabricated and Induced Illness, tried as much by politicians and the media as by the GMC, and were recommended for erasure from the medical register. Both successfully appealed and were returned to the medical register. We are strongly critical of the alleged 'expert' advice the GMC used in deciding to hold hearings in these cases.

The effects of the GMC's actions against these two high-profile experts has been worryingly damaging to child protection. Paediatricians at all levels have become less willing to engage with child protection cases, and those who do are more likely to prepare reports that sit on the fence and do not help direct the courts. Whilst the impact of the GMC Hearings damaged the professional and personal lives of David Southall and Roy Meadow, it is vulnerable children who are most likely to have suffered due to the failure of doctors who were less willing to protect them.

The GMC are soon to close their own consultation on guidance to doctors in matters relating to child protection. However, whilst this draft guidance deals with communicating with parents, it is short on the difficulties faced by paediatricians when parents deceive doctors or use complaints to the GMC as a means of dealing with allegations against them. Whilst doctors dealing with child protection have become sadly too familiar with these scenarios, the GMC clearly chose to act on behalf of parents accused of child abuse, rather than understanding the needs of the children involved. Until the GMC shows such understanding, paediatricians will remain wary of involvement in such cases and children will suffer.

We submitted a lengthy complaint about the GMC's actions to the Health Select Committee in 2008, but this matter was not a priority. We now believe the GMC should be subject to an independent inquiry to examine how decisions were made that led to these inappropriate hearings so that in the future the GMC will not deter engagement in child protection.

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