

## **PACA Press Release Version 2**

### **Independent Inquiry Needed into the GMC's Treatment of David Southall**

Professionals Against Child Abuse (PACA) is relieved that common sense has prevailed in the latest General Medical Council (GMC) Fitness to Practise Hearing against Professor David Southall, which found him not guilty of serious professional misconduct. This dealt with complaints by two parents who had been found by the Family Courts and an expert child protection case conference to have abused their children.

While Professor Southall's evidence was instrumental in protecting the children in both of these cases, the parents complained about his conduct to the GMC. The GMC found no problems with the way in which Professor Southall handled the child protection issues in these cases. However, the GMC allowed new concerns raised by the parents' paid expert, Professor Tim David, about minor administration matters to go forward to a Fitness to Practise hearing; these issues related to filing and copying correspondence, and resulted in no harm to children, professionals, or anyone else.

Although PACA welcomes the result of the GMC hearing, we are deeply concerned about the worrying message this latest hearing sends out, which is that the GMC will not protect doctors concerned with child protection matters against the vexatious complaints of parents who have, or may have, abused their children. Furthermore, if doctors raise safeguarding concerns (as the GMC would expect), they are at risk of having their careers and lives ruined if the parents complain about the doctor involved. Sadly, this is not so uncommon when abusive behaviour is uncovered, especially in fabricated or induced illness.

PACA therefore believes that the way in which the GMC has treated Professor Southall and upheld the vexatious complaints of parents known to have abused their children will cause serious damage to child protection. Simply, doctors will not want to risk getting involved in child protection issues. As a result, children in the UK will continue to be abused.

For the sake of children and the doctors responsible for supporting and protecting them, PACA is calling for an independent inquiry into the actions of the GMC to examine the reasons for its decisions that led to these inappropriate hearings against Professor Southall, to ensure that the GMC will never again support known child abusers and consequently deter the engagement of the medical profession in child protection.

To help mitigate the damage the GMC has brought to child protection through these proceedings, PACA strongly recommends that the GMC apologises to Professor Southall and makes it explicitly clear that it would not undertake such inappropriate investigations. In addition, we recommend that the GMC is more transparent, careful, and appropriate in its selection of experts.