Update
by Brian Parrott

Working together

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Nearly two years ago, my colleague directors – Ed Marsden, Lesley Sargeant and John Underwood – and I came up with the idea of Verita, a specialist management consultancy that would help public sector organisations to set up, conduct and manage inquiries, investigations and reviews when things went wrong.
Update

from Brian Parrott

We wanted to help organisations negotiate the inquiry minefield, bringing them successfully to the other side learning lessons and establishing improved arrangements for the future.

Based on our collective experience of working in health and social services, we thought there would be demand for what we had to offer. But just how much has surprised even us.

Our client list continues to grow, as does the diversity of the work we do. We are currently working for Greater Manchester, Hampshire & Isle of Wight, and West Midlands South strategic health authorities, Swale Primary Care Trust, the Department of Health, Medway Council and the London Borough of Camden. The work ranges from mental health homicide inquiries and disciplinary investigations to helping develop a new national protocol for NHS patient safety incidents requiring investigation by the Police and/or Health & Safety Executive.

To help us cope with growing demand, we have recruited a number of highly skilled and experienced associates with backgrounds in health, social care, local government and the private sector.

I am very proud of what we have achieved for our clients so far — and pleased that our work has achieved a national profile. The report on corporate governance for The Royal United Hospital Bath NHS Trust was one of the six major national reports analysed by the Audit Commission in 2003 in its management paper on corporate governance - and was used as a case study by the NHS Modernisation Agency in its Forward thinking programme for executive directors.

I look forward to an exciting and rewarding year ahead.

Brian Parrott – Director, Verita.

The Department of Health Investigations & Inquiries Unit has commissioned Verita to help develop a new national protocol for working with the police and the Health & Safety Executive when things go wrong in the NHS.
Working with the Police

and the Health & Safety Executive

Verita’s role is to act as project manager to the national development group and to help draft the national protocol and NHS guidelines. The development group is made up of representatives from the Department of Health and the NHS, the Police and the Health & Safety Executive. It is chaired by John Broughton, assistant chief constable of Essex Police.

Chief superintendent Ian McNeill, a member of the development group, says: ‘The point of this blueprint is to enhance public safety. It allows both the NHS and the Police to know exactly what their roles and responsibilities are when dealing with serious untoward incidents.’

Verita director Ed Marsden says: ‘NHS patient safety incidents requiring investigation by the Police and/or the Health & Safety Executive are few in number. But on the rare occasions they occur they need to be investigated properly. The protocol promotes partnership and effective liaison and the NHS guidelines will give practical advice on how to respond.’

The new national protocol and associated NHS guidelines are expected to be published later this year.

Lord Laming, chairman of the Victoria Climbie Inquiry, and Frank Dobson MP, former secretary of state for health, are to take part in a one-day seminar on inquiries in the public sector.
Lessons from Climbie

Verita directors Ed Marsden and John Underwood will also take part. John will chair the seminar and give a presentation on communication implications of reviews, including handling the media. And Ed will discuss the importance of robust project management of inquiries to prevent costs spiralling out of control.

Other speakers include Robert Francis QC and David Mason, partner and head of Capsticks Solicitors Inquiries Team.

The one-day seminar is organised by The House Magazine as part of its Westminster Explained series. It takes place on Thursday 4 March at The Royal Society of Arts, 8 John Adams Street, London WC2. For more information visit: www.westminster-explained.com

Experienced health, social care and local government specialists Malcolm Barnard, Jenny Clark, Philip Gill, Janet Harrison-Mee, Roger Jefferies, Barry Morris, Roger Townsend, and Jane Wonnacott have joined the Verita team as associates.
Expanding

the team

'We are delighted to have people of such high calibre working alongside us. They know how public sector organisations work and what it takes to get inquiries, investigations and reviews right,' says Verita director Brian Parrott.

'Their first-hand experience of leading and managing reviews on complex and sensitive issues will greatly increase our capacity and enable us to continue to provide a high-quality service to our growing list of clients,' he adds.

Barry Morris is the secretary to an NHS statutory inquiry into a birthing centre.

Malcolm Barnard is leading an external review of three ‘serious untoward incidents’ involving mental health patients.

Jenny Clark has recently carried out an investigation following the suspension of a senior manager.

Roger Townsend is working on a service level agreement for providing health care to prisoners.

Many thanks to everyone who came along to Verita’s first seminar in September last year, and took part in a useful and wide ranging discussion on current issues relating to inquiries, investigations and reviews in social services.
Verita’s first seminar

David Behan, until recently president of the Association of Directors of Social Services, kicked off the seminar by setting inquiries in the context of learning, improvement and accountability; Ed Marsden, director of Verita, highlighted the importance of managing potentially conflicting objectives and expectations; and Roger Jefferies, author of SOLACE publication Getting it right: guidance on the conduct of effective and fair ad hoc inquiries, gave practical advice on when and how to set up and manage inquiries.

Colleagues from the Department of Health Investigations & Inquiries Unit, Capsticks Solicitors, and Verita associates Janet Harrison-Mee, Jenny Clark and Malcolm Barnard were also available to share their wealth of experience.

A further seminar is planned for autumn 2004.

The founding directors of Verita - Ed Marsden, Brian Parrott, Lesley Sargeant and John Underwood - combine a wealth of experience in managing all aspects of inquiries, investigations and reviews in the NHS and social services including dissemination of findings and media handling.
The **Key players**

As a former senior health service manager, Ed Marsden has extensive experience of leading and developing complex organisations and managing highly-sensitive political issues. He was director of performance management for West Kent Health Authority where he successfully directed and handled the organisational and political consequences of the Michael Stone Inquiry on behalf of Kent health and social care agencies. He also oversaw the development of primary care trusts in West Kent. Before joining West Kent Health Authority Ed worked for the National Audit Office and the Department of Health. He has a clinical background in general and psychiatric nursing.

Brian Parrott combines both health and social care experience. He was appointed chair of Central Suffolk NHS Primary Care Trust in April 2002 after a career in social work and management of local authority social services spanning 30 years. His social services career includes six years as director of social services for Surrey County Council (1995 to 2001) and a spell as interim director of social services for Cambridgeshire County Council. He is currently at interim non executive director of The Office of the Independent Regulator of NHS Foundation Trusts and undertakes consultancy in relation to performance improvement and joint arrangements between social services and the NHS.

Lesley Sargeant is a communication specialist who, in addition to being a director of Verita, is also a director of CLEAR - a communication consultancy that specialises in health and social services. Before joining CLEAR in 1996 Lesley had a successful inhouse career in the NHS where she was press and public relations manager for North East Thames Regional Health Authority and the founding head of public relations for NHS Supplies. Previously she had worked as an editor for the World Health Organisation in Geneva.

John Underwood is also a director of both Verita and CLEAR. Before founding the CLEAR consultancy in 1991 John Underwood was director of communication for the Labour Party and an award-winning TV reporter and presenter for the BBC, ITV and Channel Four. In recent years he has concentrated his efforts on crisis management and has handled numerous high-profile crises on behalf of health and social care organisations. He recently won the Institute of Public Relations’ Sword of Excellence Award for issue and crisis handling for work carried out on behalf of St George’s Healthcare NHS Trust.