



IMPROVEMENT THROUGH INVESTIGATION

Press release

Organisations must be alert to 'superheroes' and 'lone wolves' to stop abuse, says leading investigator.

Organisations must be much more alert to patterns of behaviour to identify and stop abuse by staff, is the message today from leading independent investigator Verita

Analysis of investigations by Verita into abuse or malpractice by medical professionals showed there were common traits which, if identified and challenged earlier, could help stop or prevent potential safeguarding issues.

The analysis of four cases identified four common traits:

- professionals being given 'superhero' status;
- the ability for individuals to operate as a 'lone wolf';
- staff and systems failing to detect 'weak signals'; and
- lack of clarity for patients, parents and staff on the practical protection safeguarding and other policies should provide.

The analysis was based on the cases of three medical professionals - Ian Paterson (breast surgeon), Myles Bradbury (paediatric oncologist) and David Britten (senior nurse in an eating disorder clinic) - all responsible for abuse or malpractice in recent years. Also included was the case of George Rowlands, an obstetrician and gynaecologist whose surgical work was the subject of a class action brought by women in his care. The analysis also drew on Verita's experience of the Savile investigations and other work on governance and safeguarding over the last 15 years.

Verita's managing director Ed Marsden said:

"Given recent cases of abuse in the health and care sector, football and other sports, and cadet forces, there are tangible lessons to be learnt to protect children and other

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IMPROVEMENT THROUGH INVESTIGATION

vulnerable people from abusers in positions of power. What most concerns me is that in the majority of cases, senior management had early knowledge of concerns about individuals but failed to follow these concerns up."

More detail on the four themes:

First, the 'superhero status' given to individuals due to their seniority and apparent expertise in their profession. This leads to a number of issues, including a lack of challenge from colleagues, with perhaps Jimmy Savile being the most high-profile recent case. This status allowed Ian Paterson to make false diagnoses and carry out unnecessary or dangerous breast surgery whilst receiving plaudits from many unsuspecting patients. He was also allowed to carry out colonoscopies on his patients without permission or sufficient training. Britten convinced his victims that they were receiving 'special treatment' that would resolve their eating disorders, and then betrayed their trust. Bradbury too developed a reputation as a professional who made himself available to his patients for emergency appointments when other doctors may not have.

Second, the ability to operate as a 'lone wolf', to create space and opportunities within the working environment to carry out abuse. Bradbury was able to create the space to do this despite working in a small and busy unit. He was seen as going above and beyond the call of duty by seeing children outside of normal clinic hours, providing them with his mobile number so he could liaise with them directly. Rowland practised in a separate location, subject to less stringent assessments and away from the eyes of fellow colleagues who may have challenged his approach. Like Rowland, Britten was relocated to a more remote clinic, a specialist eating disorders unit physically separated from the main hospital. Paterson split his time between working as a consultant surgeon at two Spire hospitals where he continually breached their policy on practising privileges by carrying out clinical work he didn't undertake in the NHS.

Third, lack of sensitivity to 'weak signals'. For example, both Bradbury and Paterson resisted being monitored. Bradbury was known to see children outside normal clinical hours, but was reticent to discuss these cases with colleagues and to be shadowed by medical students and doctors in training. Paterson showed similar behaviour in engaging with colleagues and professional reviews, and was even able to regulate himself at Spire's private hospitals.

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IMPROVEMENT THROUGH INVESTIGATION

Britten capitalised on poor communication between various multi-disciplinary working groups at the clinic. The number of patients on Rowland's surgical lists were not in line with those of colleagues and this had been noticed in the past.

Lastly, lack of explicit statements for staff and public on what safeguarding means in practice. For example, parents of children undergoing an examination should be absolutely clear on chaperoning policy and the level of expected physical contact before each examination begins. This is especially important for teenagers and vulnerable adults who may choose not to be accompanied, and they and parents and carers should be encouraged to proactively ask and challenge staff on what to expect.

Ed Marsden continued:

“Our investigations have lessons for boards and management teams in all sectors, not just health. Boards must be more inquisitive and alert to concerns raised about professional staff, make sure concerns are properly recorded and action followed up. Managers must be clear about professional standards, enforce these and take action when they are breached. For example, it took nine years between concerns first being raised about Paterson before he was finally suspended by the General Medical Council...”

“Unorthodox practice and lone working should be discussed openly and investigated where necessary. This means it is critically important that children, young people and their families are absolutely clear on what to expect from professional staff, and feel comfortable asking questions and challenging if they have any concerns, no matter how small.”

Notes to editors

1. Verita is a leading independent consultancy for regulated organisations, offering a comprehensive range of reviews, services and support, from proactive diagnostics, through to full investigations of complex, sensitive and often high-profile incidents. Recent examples of Verita's investigations include: producing a report into the themes and lessons from NHS investigations into Jimmy Savile's abuse at the request of the

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IMPROVEMENT THROUGH INVESTIGATION

Secretary of State for Health in 2015; investigations into concerns about Yarl's Wood immigration removal centre in 2016 and; a 2015 review into issues that may have contributed to the preventable death of Connor Sparrowhawk at Southern Health Mental Health Foundation Trust.

2. The four reviews referenced here are available on Verita's website:

[Myles Bradbury - published October 2015](#)

[Ian Paterson - published March 2014](#)

[George Rowland - published January 2010](#)

[David Britten - published July 2008.](#)

3. Further investigations and reviews are also available at www.verita.net

4. For media enquiries, please contact Stephen Webb on 07500 126876 or email StephenWebb@verita.net