

## Public Concern at Work

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### Press Release, Thursday 02 June 2011

Cathy James, Chief Executive of the UK whistleblowing charity Public Concern at Work, responds to Panorama film 'Undercover Care: The Abuse Exposed' first broadcast Tuesday 31 May 2011.

#### **Turning a blind eye in the Care Sector**

"There is no doubt that more needs to be done about the state of care services in the UK as the Panorama programme on Tuesday sadly demonstrates. Here at Public Concern at Work, we too had the sense that all was not right when we started our project looking into the care sector<sup>1</sup>. Prompted by the fact that year on year we receive the highest proportion of calls to our whistleblowing advice line from those working in care and that these calls are often the most harrowing and disturbing of all the calls we receive. This is because at their worst they involve the abuse and neglect of the vulnerable and because those who care for them are often low paid in a disparate industry where cutting costs is sometimes a higher priority than protecting those least able to protect themselves. Workers in these places need all the help they can get to be able to speak up to protect the vulnerable they care for. Our research showed that concerns about abuse (including verbal and physical abuse), neglect and lack of dignity had been raised by staff only to be ignored and that this means that a worrying culture of silence can sometimes seem to be the norm in some of the nation's care homes. At the time of the launch of our report in April this year I said:

"Our research demonstrates there are systemic deficiencies that prevent care workers from speaking up effectively to protect vulnerable adults. This must be addressed. We have to ensure that every worker who is in a position to speak up is encouraged and supported. Whistleblowers should not be lone voices in the workplace. This is all the more important when safeguarding those who cannot speak up for themselves."

I do not relish the fact that this has now been confirmed as a justified call for action just as the whistleblower working at Winterbourne View will feel no pride in the fact that he has had to expose such appalling care conditions on national television in order to be listened to. How much more of a wake-up call do our regulatory bodies, and particularly local authorities and the Care Quality Commission, need before they understand that they can learn more about the culture of a care home from information they receive from a concerned member of staff than they will ever receive from a planned inspection. More whistleblowers need to be listened to and their concerns acted upon in order to protect the vulnerable and they need to be listened to now."

**Cathy James, Chief Executive**

#### **Note to editors:**

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<sup>1</sup> See our report 'Speaking up for vulnerable adults - what the whistleblowers say' at: [http://www.pcaw.co.uk/news\\_attachments/Speaking%20up%20for%20vulnerable%20adults,%20what%20the%20whistleblowers%20say,%20PCAWApril2011.pdf](http://www.pcaw.co.uk/news_attachments/Speaking%20up%20for%20vulnerable%20adults,%20what%20the%20whistleblowers%20say,%20PCAWApril2011.pdf).

making **whistleblowing** work

Public Concern at Work, the whistleblowing advice line, is an independent charity set up in 1993. We give free, confidential advice to those concerned about malpractice or wrongdoing in the workplace. We also help organisations to address risk responsibly. The charity was instrumental in getting the whistleblowing legislation, the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998, on the statute books. For more information please visit [www.pcaw.org.uk](http://www.pcaw.org.uk).

Headlines from research include:

- Over 15%<sup>2</sup> of all whistleblowing concerns to Public Concern at Work's helpline came from the care sector.
- Half are concerns about abuse in care.
- In 40% of cases whistleblowers' concerns were either ignored or denied by management.
- In half of all cases where other staff knew about a risk they were either too scared or felt unable to speak up.
- Over 80% of the whistleblowers had already raised their concern before calling for advice. The majority said they wish they had sought advice from Public Concern at Work before taking action.
- Few care workers knew of or used their whistleblowing policy.

**For further comment and information, please contact:**

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<sup>2</sup> Since we were established in 1993, we have received over 19,000 calls. In 2001 we developed a database to capture information about the individual caller and their concern. Therefore we have full sets of data for 2002 - 2010. During this period we have advised 13,406 individuals, 7994 of which were classified as public calls, i.e. those with a whistleblowing concern. The remainder are those where the caller is seeking advice about a private matter. 1,180 of our public calls (15%) were from the care sector.