Minister signs partnership agreement on tackling violence against NHS staff

Health Minister, Dr Brian Gibbons, has today (Thursday, 22 March 2007) signed a partnership agreement with the Crown Prosecution Service on tackling violence against health workers in Wales.

The aim of the Memorandum of Understanding is to ensure effective and robust prosecutions of cases involving violence and abuse against NHS staff.

Speaking about the agreement Dr Gibbons said that it would engender confidence in the prosecution process amongst NHS staff in Wales and send a clear signal to everyone that abusing health staff is totally unacceptable.

The agreement clearly sets out the respective roles and responsibilities of the NHS and the CPS in pursuing prosecutions. It will also make sure that the exchange of information and communication between the two organisations is efficient and effective.

The CPS will work with the police to ensure that cases are treated with the seriousness that they deserve and the NHS will provide any support that the CPS may need such as providing access to evidence.

Speaking at the signing in the accident and emergency department at the Royal Gwent Hospital in Newport, Dr Brian Gibbons said:

All health professionals are dedicated and committed to doing the best for their patients. The threat of violence not only carries obvious injury and distress to staff but it stops patients getting the vital treatment they need. It can also lead to increased sickness absence and poor morale.

Violence against our hard working staff is completely unacceptable and we need to do as much as we can to make sure that the perpetrators are prosecuted. A robust and effective prosecution policy needs to be in place. This agreement with the Crown Prosecution Service provides the groundwork for this.

The Director of Public Prosecutions, Sir Ken Macdonald QC confirmed the commitment of the Crown Prosecution Service to working with the Welsh Assembly Government as it applies to the NHS in Wales in tackling violence against NHS staff.

Sir Ken said:

It is clearly in the public interest to prosecute those who endanger NHS staff, so long as there is sufficient evidence for a realistic prospect of conviction. Prosecution is part of
the overall strategy for combating this type of crime. The CPS will work with the police to encourage priority action for violence and aggression on NHS staff, and will apply a robust charging policy.

Speaking at the event Steve Sloan from Amicus said:

Amicus welcomes the signing of the memorandum as a step in the right direction and we are pleased to see the Welsh Assembly Government taking the issue of violence against NHS staff seriously. We look forward to working in partnership to ensure that our NHS members have safe conditions in which to work.

Tina Donnelly, Director RCN Wales, said:

We welcome the signing of the Memorandum today. This is a great first step in tackling the violence and aggression that healthcare staff have to put up with on a daily basis. The RCN has been campaigning for sanctions against people who abuse NHS members of staff. It is not sufficient to just put up a notice – when people are drunk and disorderly or aggressive in Accident and Emergency the last thing they are going to do is to read a notice and then simply stop. Employers and NHS organisations have a responsibility to ensure health and safety at work, that staff can work in an environment where they know they are going to be safe.

NHS Staff in Wales are at greater risk of violence or verbal abuse than many other professionals. During the financial year 2005-06 there were nearly 7,800 reported violent or aggressive incidents perpetrated against health staff in Wales.

The memorandum goes hand in hand with other initiatives to tackle violence and abuse against health workers. The Welsh Assembly Government is working on a similar agreement with the Association of Chief Police Officers and an agreement with Welsh Health Legal Services to increase prosecutions. Each NHS body will also have a Director who has responsibility for monitoring and acting on assaults against staff.

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