



PRESS RELEASE

12th FEBRUARY FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

QUESTIONS OVER GMC REMAIN TEN YEARS AFTER SHIPMAN

Action against Medical Accidents ('AvMA') - the charity which campaigns for better patient safety and justice – has spoken out about its concerns over the regulation of doctors as BBC Radio 4 marks the tenth anniversary of the conviction of Dr Harold Shipman (*Could Shipman Happen Again?*, 8 pm Thursday, 12th February 2009).

The charity cites two cases in which it is currently involved, which it says seriously calls into question whether the General Medical Council (GMC) – the body which regulates doctors – is fit for its purpose of protecting patients. On 24th February AvMA is seeking a judicial review of a GMC decision not even to investigate doctors alleged of trying to cover up errors which led to the death of 10 year old Robbie Powell in South Wales, by falsifying medical records. A police investigation found evidence of forgery and perverting the course of justice.

March sees the start of the inquest into 10 of suspicious deaths at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital, near Portsmouth in the late 1990's. AvMA is supporting families of those who died and has asked the GMC to explain why it only took action to protect patients by placing restrictions on the practice of the doctor at the centre of allegations in July last year, when they knew of the same concerns several years previously. The doctor was already due to face a fitness to practise panel about concerns over her prescribing of diamorphine at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

Peter Walsh, Chief Executive of AvMA, said:

“The GMC has come a long way in the last 10 years but even today the jury is still out on whether it is fit for purpose. That it is possible for such a serious error of judgement over the doctors in the Robbie Powell case, is extremely worrying. Their position on this suggests that they will not take action about a doctor unless and until an individual or organisation formally asks them to, however much they already know. In effect they are also promoting a “liar’s charter”, in that their position suggests that if a doctor manages to avoid a ‘cover-up’ being reported to the GMC for over five years, the GMC will not take action anyway.

In the case of Gosport, one has to ask why, if they saw it necessary in July last year to protect the public by placing restrictions on the doctor’s practice, they didn’t do so years earlier when they became aware of the concerns”.

ENDS

1. For further information contact Peter Walsh on 0208 688 9555 or Code A
2. Website: www.avma.org.uk
3. AvMA is a registered charity no. 299123 and a limited company registered in England No 2405420