



Healthcare Commission report causes concern that adults with learning disabilities are at risk of abuse

A coalition of learning disabilities charities are concerned that adults with learning disabilities are at risk of abuse after a Healthcare Commission national audit found that most healthcare services “pay insufficient attention to safeguarding”.

Anti-abuse charities the Ann Craft Trust, Respond and Voice UK are particularly concerned by the Commission’s findings that:

- background and criminal records checks are not always carried out on care staff;
- whistleblowing policies are rarely used;
- a lack of awareness of what constitutes abuse means that there is a potential for abusive practices to continue unchallenged;
- fewer than half of services have adequate procedures / policies around safeguarding;
- there is a lack of staff training about protecting adults with learning disabilities; and
- that “a sizeable minority of organisations are falsely reassured” that their staff know how to make adult protection referrals if they suspect someone is being abused.

“This is deeply worrying” said Richard Curen, Director of Respond. “It looks like adults with learning disabilities are being put at risk of abuse in those very services which are meant to be caring for them.”

Kathryn Stone OBE, Chief Executive of Voice UK said “what is particularly worrying is that this audit reveals that in many healthcare settings staff will simply not know what to do if they see an adult with learning disabilities being abused. It also frightens me that in this day and age it seems we can not be sure that all staff work with vulnerable people received a Criminal Records Bureau check.”

“We want to thank the Healthcare Commission for this work” stated Deborah Kitson, Director of the Ann Craft Trust. “I’m pleased that the Commission found that there are dedicated staff following good practice and that many organisations are changing their practices. However, we must not be complacent - this audit reveals that there is still a lot of bad practice out there.”

The Ann Craft Trust, Respond and Voice UK endorse the Healthcare Commission’s observation that this could be partly addressed if:

- services adhere to appropriate policies and procedures;
- Staff received training on safeguarding and abuse;
- skilled advocates who “can provide valuable external scrutiny and potentially shine a light on poor behaviours” are provided for adults with learning disabilities.