



HHO HHO CARBON CLEANER 6.0

Do you want to be Agent

Newest and unique technology of engine carbonCleaning, looking for business cooperation

Visit Site

Ad

HOME » NEWS » HEALTH » HEALTH NEWS

## NHS whistleblower faces ruin after speaking out about patient safety

An NHS whistleblower who claims he was paid £500,000 to keep quiet over patient safety last night said he feared he would "lose everything" by speaking out against the "culture of fear" in the health service.



Former NHS Hospital Chief Executive Gary Walker Photo: David Rose

By John-Paul Ford Rojas, and Richard Alleyne  
7:00AM GMT 15 Feb 2013

Gary Walker, who was head of a hospital trust that is now being investigated over high death rates, said he was paid £500,000 to keep quiet when he was dismissed in 2010.

But when he decided to reveal his concerns earlier this week he was threatened with legal action and told by the NHS he faced paying back the money and any extra legal costs.

The father-of-two went ahead anyway.

"I stand to lose everything if they sue," he told the **Daily Mail**.

I only signed the order because my legal fees had reached £100,000 and I was about to lose my house.

### Related Articles

- Let's not panic over a new virus 24 Feb 2013
- Gerry Robinson: We can fix the NHS 17 Feb 2013
- No one wants to talk about the real scandal of our time 16 Feb 2013
- A&E departments so short-staffed four in 10 doctors are locums, warns report 15 Feb 2013
- Mid Staffs: police chief challenged over failure to investigate 14 Feb 2013
- Up to 50pc of deaths at Mid-Staffs NHS trust on Care Pathway 15 Feb 2013

"Now I risk having to repay even more than the settlement because I could be liable for the trust's legal fees. I face ruin.

"But it has got to the stage where thousands and thousands of patients are dying needlessly in NHS hospitals and the government says no one's to blame, someone needs to stand up and be counted."

Mr Walker alleges that he prioritised scarce resources on emergency care despite pressure from above to meet targets on non-emergency treatment "whatever the demand", while he was chief executive at the United Lincolnshire Hospitals trust (ULHT).

He claimed that on one occasion he was even ordered by a strategic health authority boss, now a senior NHS official, to take hospitals off "red alert" status – meaning that they were too full to take any more patients – because of a delicate budget meeting taking place at the time.

The allegations prompted Stephen Dorrell, chairman of the Commons health select committee, to call for a new criminal offence to combat the "corrupt" practice of NHS employees being gagged from speaking out over patient safety.

Mr Walker was sacked from the Trust in February 2010. Officially, the reason for his dismissal was that he swore openly at meetings but his supporters claimed there was more to the charge.

The trust is now being investigated over fears that as many as 500 patients may have died needlessly because of poor care.

Mr Walker told a newspaper that he warned Sir David in a three-page letter in 2009 that things were going badly wrong.

Managers in the trust had been told their "careers rested on delivering the targets" and were neglecting patient care, he told the Daily Mail.

He claimed Sir David was "not interested in patient safety" and should resign.

The NHS chief is already under pressure for presiding over the Mid Staffordshire scandal where failures in patient care that led to the deaths of up to 1,200 patients were laid bare in a damning report last week. He has resisted calls to quit.

Mr Walker said he had warned senior civil servants that he was confronted with the same choices over prioritising care that resulted in the scandal.

He told BBC Radio 4's Today programme: "It's a simple decision: you have emergency care or you have care that could wait.

"It's not nice to wait but it could wait and therefore we chose as a board – it was not just me – that ... emergency care should take priority."

He said he was ordered by the East Midlands Strategic Health Authority to meet the 18-week non-emergency target "whatever the demand" and was told to resign when he would not do so.

Mr Walker told the Today programme he accepted a so-called "supergag" as part of a settlement package of an unfair dismissal claim – reported to be at least £500,000 – to protect his family.

He said: "This is a culture of fear, a culture of oppression – of information that's either going to embarrass a civil servant or embarrass a minister.

"These are big problems. And if you consider that the people that have been running the NHS have created that culture of fear, they need either to be held to account or new people need to be brought in to change that culture."

Mr Walker said on one occasion he had put hospitals on "red alert" – a system used within the NHS to tell other hospitals, ambulances, and GPs that the hospital is full.

"I got a phone call from the health authority – this is Barbara Hakin – saying to me that I needed to come off red alert. I said 'the hospital is not safe to come off red alert' because it's full".

"The response was 'well, we have a capital budget that we're going to approve today and if you're still on red alert it's going to be difficult for me to support your case to the board.

"My view was 'what's the approval of capital money got to do with running a safe hospital?' So these are the sort of the threats that are made to you in order for you to keep trying to deliver targets and that's just not the right way."

A statement on behalf of the East Midlands Strategic Health Authority and Dame Barbara Hakin said: "The East Midlands SHA totally refutes all the allegations made by Gary Walker and his account of the specific conversations with Dame Barbara Hakin, the then SHA chief executive.

"During her tenure as SHA chief executive, Dame Barbara Hakin acted at all times in the interest of patients, ensuring that they received high quality and safe services."

ULHT said: "The agreement we reached with Gary Walker is not about stopping people from raising any concerns they may have around patient services, it related to employment proceedings."

An NHS spokesman said it had recently set out a "legal right" for staff to raise concerns about safety and it had been made it clear to NHS hospitals that "gagging" clauses should not be used.

Mr Dorrell, a former health secretary, condemned the use of gagging orders and told an interviewer on Today: "This has been going on for far, far too long and I don't think your word corrupt is too strong.

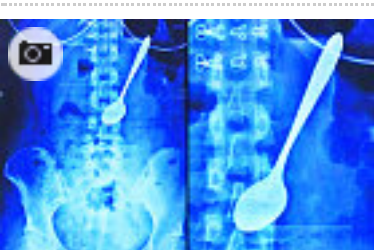
"It is fundamentally wrong that within a service that uses public money to treat patients, that information about patient safety should be regarded as something that is negotiable whether people are accountable for it.

"We need to deliver a fundamental change in a culture which thinks this kind of practice is acceptable."

He said his committee would consider a recommendation from the Mid Staffs report by Robert Francis that "action taken by any individual within the health service to suppress information which relates to patient safety ... should be a criminal offence".

Health News  
News » UK News » Health » John-Paul Ford Rojas »

### In Health News



Weird X-rays



Life begins at 70



Living proof: the secret of healthy ageing

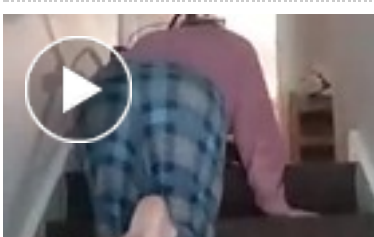


Why olive oil should be kept out of the frying pan

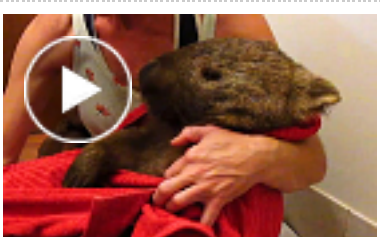


Ebola outbreak in pictures

### Latest Videos



Disabled great-grandfather denied stairlift and forced to crawl



Elderly wombat rescued after being attacked



Sponsored When media meets medicine

### More From The Telegraph

CREATE AMAZING WEB APPS WITHOUT WRITING CODE

famous

### More From The Web

The future of online learning

Fast, fun and fully interactive language courses available online.

View

### More From The Telegraph

A little revolution has started...

TransferWise. Send money abroad without the hidden costs.

View

### Paid content

Chic Ideas for Shelving (Mansion Global)

20 Awesome Christmas Deals That'll Save You Hundreds - See While... (Christmas Gifts Guide)

Are you looking for a remedy for neck and back pain? Discover... (Next Tech)

No Language is "Foreign" with This Brilliant Japanese Invention (Next Tech)

Recommended by Outbrain

The Telegraph SIGN UP TO OUR FRONT PAGE NEWSLETTER

SIGN UP NOW

### Paid content

Recommended by Outbrain

Mansion Global Daily: Celebs in the New York...

25 Hot Christmas Gifts That May Sell out This October

Back to top