



Press statement: Safeguarding Adults Review for Joanna, Jon and Ben

An independent report has urged the Government and local agencies to take action to protect people with learning disabilities, after three people died at a private hospital.

Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board commissioned Margaret Flynn to report into the deaths of Joanna, Jon and Ben at Cawston Park, a hospital for people with learning disabilities and/or autism, between April 2018 and July 2020. Joanna and Jon came from London Boroughs and Ben came from Norfolk.

Cawston Park was placed into special measures by the Care Quality Commission in September 2019 and was closed by its owners, the Jeetal Group, in May this year (2021).

The report says: “The relatives of the three adults, and those of other patients, described indifferent and harmful hospital practices, which ignored their questions and distress.

“They were not assisted by care management or coordination activities. People’s families could not value the unsafe grouping of certain patients, the excessive use of restraint and seclusion by unqualified staff, their relatives’ “overmedication,” or the hospital’s high tolerance of inactivity – all of which presented risks of further harm.

“In addition, these patients did not benefit from attention to the complex causes of their behaviour, to their mental distress or physical health care.”

The safeguarding adults report, which contains 13 recommendations, is published today at <https://www.norfolksafeguardingadultsboard.info/>. Copies have been shared with the families of Joanna, Jon and Ben, the Government (the Department of Health and Social Care), NHS England, the Care Quality Commission, Norfolk and Waveney Clinical Commissioning Group and Norfolk County Council’s adult social care department.

Margaret Flynn, the report’s author, said: “Joanna, Jon and Ben all had aspirations – they wanted to be near their families, to have friends and jobs or things to do each day.

“Their lives at Cawston Park Hospital were characterised by unhealthy lifestyles of long term under-occupation and were not shaped by their goals or interests. The distress of their parents sets an agenda that cannot be ignored.

“To quote Ben’s mum, Gina – ‘This has got to stop. There are other homes like this. This mustn’t happen to anyone else. If you ill-treated an animal, you get put in prison. But people ill-treated my son and they’re still free.

“My report highlights failures of governance, commissioning, oversight, planning for individuals and professional practice. It re-visits the findings concerning Winterbourne View Hospital ten years ago. The legal structures of companies responsible for the culture of services supporting people with life-long support needs must be transparent and accountable. They must reveal whether and how the public interest and the significant NHS investment is represented on their Boards. In addition, a progressive and non-sectored solution from which assessment and treatment units are excluded altogether remains to be led by Westminster.”

Joan Maughan, who commissioned the report as chair of the Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board, said: “The Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board members received the review report of these tragic deaths with genuine heartfelt sympathy for the families who have lost their loved ones.

“That is not enough. This is not the first tragedy of its kind and, unless things change dramatically, it will not be the last.

“There will always be occasions when some people with learning disabilities and/or autism require specialist support for their very complex needs.

“This calls for a determined and robust commitment from all health, social care, housing and other agencies, at both a national and local level, to develop bespoke services matched to the individual – services that ensure safety, respect, care for their physical and mental health wellbeing, stimulating activities, and plans for a meaningful life in the future.”

Any former residents of Cawston Park or their relatives who have concerns in the light of this report can contact Norfolk County Council’s adult social services team on 0344 800 8020.

Media note:

Video statements from Margaret Flynn and Joan Maughan will be available at the Norfolk Safeguarding Adults Board website, later today (September 9).

Statements from agencies and organisations identified in the report should be sought from the agencies concerned.

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