

Reinstate Charlotte Monro: Silenced for Caring



Charlotte Monro, chair of Unison branch at Whipps Cross and for many years Whipps Cross staff side chair has been dismissed by Barts health trust after a disciplinary hearing involving allegations over her union work. Our branch is shocked and angry at this decision, as are so many others, not only because of the injustice to a long standing committed member of staff but because of the implications for our right to speak out and the rights of trade unions. We are calling for her re-instatement, and asking others who feel the same to do so too.

Charlotte has worked for 26 years as an OT and a moving and handling co-ordinator in the trust and its Whipps Cross predecessors. She and her union are appealing the disciplinary outcome.

Barts Health are removing one of the most experienced and effective union voices at a time when staff face massive downbanding and impact on their jobs and working conditions as the trust put itself in financial turnaround, and ahead of the trust launching their strategy for the future of Whipps Cross and the other hospitals within the merged trust. It is an attack on all health workers rights to organise at a time of unprecedented threat to the NHS.

Unions and health staff have a crucial contribution to make to rational and informed public discussion on our health services, their direction and future. Fear should never be allowed to enter such debate. We have a right and responsibility to advocate for patients and to campaign for services, staffing levels, staff pay, conditions and well-being. The action against Charlotte is seen by very many staff as the visible tip of a dangerous culture beneath the surface. A culture in which if you speak out and challenge the official line from those high up in the trust your position and future may be at risk.

The Trust has publicly denied that Charlotte has been dismissed over union activities, saying it was for 'personal misconduct'.

But we are very clear that Charlotte has been dismissed for her union work and these are the issues:

1. Speaking out

Charlotte spoke in her union capacity to elected councillors on 26th June at London Borough of Waltham Forest Overview and Scrutiny sub-committee about changes to the stroke service. A week later she was informed by senior HR she was under disciplinary investigation. They alleged she "brought the trust into disrepute by providing inaccurate information to OSC"; and included two further allegations relating to her union work.

At the scrutiny committee Charlotte had raised the concerns of clinical staff in the Whipps Cross unit over losing their additional stroke-specific gym with the merger of two wards, and over the level of stroke bed reductions - also questioned by WF Clinical Commissioning Group at that time. This the trust have termed 'inaccurate information' as they disagreed with the staff's views that there could be any detriment to patients, and have classed Charlotte's action 'serious misconduct' justifying dismissal.

The OSC sub committee chair has made it clear to the trust that the " *...sub-committee is a democratic body and we want the community including staff to attend this sub-committee and to be able*

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to speak freely to us without threats by management against staff". At October's Trust Board meeting community campaigners asked if the Trust accepted this. Their apparent assent rings hollow whilst they have dismissed Charlotte for doing just this.

The right to be active in a trade union, the right to be an activist

2 An allegation related to a different consultation (four and a half months previously) is Charlotte "failed to respect confidentiality at the consultation sub group" which she attended as a union staff side rep. She talked to staff affected by a consultation ahead of its launch. Other union reps consider this to be a normal part of their responsibility to members where required, and gave evidence to say that. Such differences of view between unions and trust must be resolved through partnership working, not springing a disciplinary on an individual—leading to dismissal. The Trust's action now puts any rep at risk, and disregards trade union rights, rights protected in legislation.

3. A third allegation relating to trade union activities "whether a conflict of interest has arisen as a result of Charlotte's involvement with or membership of other groups and her role in the Trust's partnership forum" was not upheld because of 'insufficient evidence'. The groups referred to appear to be Patient Panel and Health Watch. That the Trust can even bring such an allegation as 'misconduct' is worrying and bizarre. The Human rights act upholds our right to freedom of association and freedom of expression. Trade union reps are probably more likely than average to be involved in active groups or campaigns because of a strong social conscience. That Charlotte referred to herself as a trade union activist was also cited against her.

4. A fourth allegation was added much later that did relate to Charlotte's employment, not her union role, but from 26 years ago, and which she had herself alerted the trust to nearly four months earlier. Having worked for one employer so long she had never before completed a CRB and advised the trust it would show convictions from encounters with police on protests 36 to 44 years ago before she became an OT, which her college knew of but she had not declared on her application form. Managers stated this is no risk to patients or staff. Whilst reasonable for the Trust to address it, we consider the extreme sanction not based on any balanced or reasonable assessment.

We are asking Barts Health to immediately reinstate Charlotte Monro.
If you feel strongly the Trust action is wrong, please write to Peter Morris, Chief Executive, Sir Stephen O'Brien Trust Chair, or your MP or Councillors. If you are happy to do copy your letter/email to unisonunion@tiscali.co.uk or reinstatcharlotte@gmail.com

Charlotte Monro, Occupational Therapist

A personal view from a colleague

I like many others was shocked to read that Charlotte Monro has been sacked from her job as Moving and Handling Coordinator at Whipps Cross Hospital. When the news finally sunk in, I reflected back over the time I had known her and felt compelled to write in support of Charlotte.

I am a former Occupational Therapy colleague of Charlotte and worked with her for most of her 26 years at Whipps. I have always and still regard her as one of the most professional people I have worked with in the NHS. She has worked tirelessly for others and is always dedicated to do the very best for patients and staff. Eighteen years ago she recognised the need for moving and handling training in the Trust. Over the years she has been responsible for inducting and updating thousands of staff on safe techniques and best practice. Just as important, her experience and expertise has been invaluable in the management of the most challenging clinical situations on the ward and in the community.

Charlotte's work has enabled patients to be treated and staff to work in a safe environment. That alone will have saved the Trust an incalculable amount of money.

Indeed in 2009 she was presented with a Trust award in recognition of her clinical work and role in championing Whipps Cross. Sadly the merger into what is now Barts Health is destroying the legacy of good work that Whipps has done for the local community. This includes the value placed on staff like Charlotte. Her dismissal will be an enormous loss to patients and staff at Whipps Cross and the community that she serves so splendidly.

Caroline Kingswood, Occupational Therapist, November 2013

The UNISON office will be distributing a petition shortly calling on the Trust to immediately re-instate Charlotte. Completed petitions will be handed to the Trust prior to Charlotte's appeal.

