



Waltham Forest's Health Union

Unison Branch Statement re: Charlotte Monro

We call on Barts Health Trust to reinstate Charlotte Monro, dismissed over her union work and for speaking out for staff and services. The current climate within the trust has to change as highlighted in the recent CQC report.

A culture of bullying; a climate where staff fear consequences if they speak out, where they find their experience and commitment is held in no value, and where the human cost of restructures and down-banding does not even enter the calculation - is not compatible with a caring health service.

The way the Trust has treated Charlotte, a long standing and well thought of member of staff, trade union rep and health campaigner is symptomatic of this unacceptable culture - from her dismissal to the attempts at denigrating her character in the press. It is an attack on our union organisation and representation of staff.

We at Whipps cross Unison are calling for support for Charlotte and to actively campaign for her reinstatement, and want to correct misinformation that has been put out.

We need to build a strong fighting union that that takes up issues, supports members, making sure they feel they can speak out without reprisals and to change the culture we now have.

We need unions to campaign across sites to defend our patients, services and staff, and to defend our NHS!

Update and Information

Barts Health Trust has upheld their decision to dismiss Charlotte Monro, our Unison Branch Chair, following her appeal. Unison is now taking her case to employment tribunal on the grounds of unfair dismissal for trade union activity, and for speaking out.

The London Region of Unison are calling for joint union discussions with Barts Health over their approach to trade union stewards and their role, and say Charlotte's dismissal highlights the need for meaningful discussions around the working relationship between Barts Health Trust and the Trade Unions. Our Branch supports this and urges all of Staff Side to as well.

The campaign for her reinstatement continues to gain support. Hundreds of people have signed letters and petitions, and written in protest to the Trust. On the eve of her appeal in December a hundred strong demonstration took place outside the Royal London. East London NHS campaigners confronted Barts Trust Board at their January meeting, and national and local media have covered the case.

It is seen as an example of a growing 'culture of diktat' within the NHS. In the light of Mid Staffs, the importance of staff feeling free and safe to speak out is crucial. This includes the right of their trade unions to speak with an independent voice on the future of services and the NHS and organise their members. The Trust's is about to launch its review of services provided in each hospital and it is urgent we secure respect for this right.

The facts of Charlotte's case are:

On July 2nd 2013 she was informed she was to be suspended from the staff partnership forum (SPF) and that a disciplinary investigation was to be launched. The three allegations all related to her trade union activities. This was initiated within a week of Charlotte speaking as a union rep at Waltham Forest Scrutiny committee of elected councillors, about staff concerns over planned stroke service change at Whipps Cross unit and the impact on their patients.

These were the allegations and our views on the issues involved:

1) That she "failed to respect confidentiality at the consultation sub group" (four and a half months previously) which she attended as a union staff side rep. In her union role she had 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 staff where required, and gave evidence to say that.

The Trust cannot dictate to the unions how they work to support their members; differences or concerns must be raised and resolved through working with the unions as equal partners. Over the 4.5 months that elapsed there was ample opportunity. Instead they chose to spring a disciplinary on an individual union rep—leading to dismissal from her own job. The Trust's action now potentially puts any rep at risk, and disregards trade union rights, rights protected in legislation.

2) That she "Brought the trust into disrepute by providing 'inaccurate' information at Waltham Forest council scrutiny committee". She had expressed the view of staff, a view that differed from that of the Trust. The Trust deemed this gross or serious misconduct and dismissed her for it. Hundreds of people in the community signed a letter stating the Trust's action to be a threat to the right of health staff to speak out, and the community to hear. The Chair of that scrutiny committee told the Trust the "*...sub-committee is a democratic body and we want the community including staff to attend ... and to be able to speak freely to us without threats by management against staff*"

At appeal this allegation was overturned, the panel asserting the Trust supports its staff raising concerns, and acknowledged Charlotte's commitment to the service. However, Bart's Trust has made no such acknowledgements in its public statements, saying instead that an allegation that she 'deliberately misrepresented in a negative manner the Trust's future intentions ..' was not upheld. Far from accepting the right of staff and unions to speak out and to open debate, this wording implies a continued threat, and speaking at Scrutiny remains the trigger for the Trust action leading to our Branch Chair's dismissal.

3) A third and bizarre allegation about a 'conflict of interest' between Charlotte's role on the Staff Partnership Forum and her membership of or involvement in 'other groups' was not upheld due to 'insufficient evidence'. Never the less the worrying implication of this allegation is a Trust view that union reps have no rights to be involved in local campaigns or other 'groups', a matter of human rights. The management case against Charlotte and the disciplinary outcome cited her involvement in the Save Whipps Cross Campaign and that she referred to herself as a union activist.

4) Nearly a month into the investigation a fourth allegation was added: that she failed to declare past convictions on her application form 26 years ago. These related to encounters with police from protest activities 34 – 44 years ago before she trained as an occupational therapist. We believe this allegation has been used to bolster the trust case against her rather than follow the approach required in Trust policy which is one of risk assessment and common sense. 26 years of unblemished service and commitment to patient and staff safety demonstrate a contribution to our local health service, not a risk.

If you would like information on how to support do contact our union branch. More info and links to news reports: http://saveournhs-el.org.uk/?page_id=21622

Contact Unison Waltham Forest Health Branch at Whipps Cross on

020 8535 6496 / Whipps Ext 5756 / email: unisonunion@tiscali.co.uk

Charlotte Monro

will be speaking at the **UNISON Branch AGM**
to be held in the Board Room, Whipps Cross Hospital,
Monday 24th March, 2014 between 12 and 2pm.