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Health staff told ‘don’t speak to press’ after regional daily exposé

by **David Sharman** Published 01 May 2015 Last updated 05 May 2015

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Health bosses have warned potential whistleblowers not to speak to the local press after a regional daily revealed hundreds of patients’ lives were being put at risk by staff shortages.

The *Sentinel*, Stoke, reported last month that there had been more than 400 “alarming incidents” raised by district nurses to Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Partnership NHS Trust in the past two years.

The failings, listed in a confidential dossier which was leaked to the paper, included cases of overworked staff bursting into tears at the end of their shifts, speeding to get to their next job and cutting their visits short.

The register, which was passed on by an anonymous source, also added patients were at risk of developing deadly pressure sores because the nurses were too busy to complete their rounds.



The report, described as a “damning dossier” by The Sentinel, provided a splash, pictured above, and spread for the newspaper last month.

However it has now emerged that the Trust’s latest internal newsletter, which has itself since been leaked to the Sentinel, contains a message to staff urging them not to give anonymous tips to the local press.

The message, written by the Trust's new nursing director Tina Cookson, states: "Staff are concerned about staffing levels but following a leak of serious incident reports to the local press I would urge all staff to continue to report incidents and encourage them to raise concerns using our existing internal channels.

"We are aware of the continued difficulties and determined to increase the pace of improvement, develop leadership at all levels and improve decision-making. I look forward to meeting many of you in the next few months but please get in touch directly if you wish."

Sentinel health reporter Dave Blackhurst said: "Documents were leaked to me from within our area's community health trust. They contained a register of complaints by district nurses of how they could not do their job safely because of staffing shortages.

"The full list ran to hundreds of incidents logged over two years about care falling short. It contained some pretty hair-raising stuff such as frail, elderly people being discharged from hospital to find no-one coming into their homes to give medication, change dressings or ease their pain in the cases of those dying from terminal illnesses.

"We covered it with a poster front and a two-page spread. It has had huge significance locally as it comes at a time when our health bodies are trying to get public support for transferring services out of our main hospital, the Royal Stoke, into the community.

"It cuts across their rhetoric that people will be safer in their homes than on a hospital ward. The leak came from a whistle blower who was frustrated that nothing was being done by the Trust's management over the growing concerns."

Tina Cookson, director of nursing and quality at Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Partnership NHS Trust, said: "As an organisation the partnership Trust encourages all staff to raise concerns when they feel appropriate.

"Staff are urged to raise concerns through existing mechanisms which are in place across the Trust.

"These include speaking to a line manager, professional leadership colleagues, union representatives, our ambassador for cultural change or through the designated raising concerns helpline established for staff.

"These internal mechanisms are encouraged to ensure that action can be made in a timely manner."

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