



Health campaigners discuss medical litigation

INTOLERABLE LEVELS OF MEDICAL ERRORS AND A MEDICAL TORT SYSTEM IN DISARRAY ...

A large part of *HSCNews* issue 27 concentrates on a subject that could be of relevance to any patient—medical errors and the effectiveness of national systems of redress.

Medical errors have reached unacceptable levels in most countries. Being on the receiving end of a medical error is bad enough for any patient. But such individuals are then horrified to discover that their only form of redress is litigation.

The USA is the world's most litigious country. Its user-friendly legal procedures can award victims huge sums of money in cases of negligence. The medical profession in the USA have long been on the defensive, demanding that their country's states place a cap on the amount of punitive court pay-outs. Some US doctors have reduced their insurance payments by withdrawing services.

By contrast, victims of medical accidents in most parts Europe (bar Scandinavian countries) have to penetrate a barrage of bureaucracy and secrecy put up by their healthcare systems. Patients who do opt to litigate confront a judicial system that favours healthcare suppliers, rather than patients.

... IMPROVING PATIENT SAFETY IS THE ANSWER

Governments everywhere are struggling to find an acceptable compromise that could permit victims to receive redress and accountability without healthcare providers being penalised into standstill. One recurring theme in this issue of *HSCNews*, however, is that irrespective of whatever legal understanding is reached, healthcare systems should learn from the mistakes made by their staff.

Throughout the next 30 pages, health campaigners from Denmark, Poland, Spain, the UK and the USA talk about the situation in their countries, and suggest some pointers for future directions. The campaigners who air their views in these pages would like to see radical improvements in patient safety. That, in itself, will go a long way towards diminishing current levels of medical litigation.