

Letby Inquiry

- [Prof Brian Edwards](#)

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Corporate Manslaughter

Three members of the Countess of Chester leadership team have been arrested by Cheshire Police on suspicion of Gross Negligence Manslaughter. They have now been released on bail.

They have not been named so we left to guess who they are.

The police want to determine whether any criminality has taken place relating to the response to the fatalities on the neonatal unit.

If found guilty the maximum penalty is life imprisonment.

There have been prison sentences in the past when guilt has been proven in other sectors of the economy but none so far in health.

Police inquiries [Operation Duet] continue into corporate manslaughter allegations about the Trust itself and into unexpected deaths and non-fatal collapses at Liverpool Women's Hospital where Letby trained.

If found guilty the corporate penalty will be a fine, in this case a very large one.

This case should send shivers down the spines of senior NHS leaders and not before time. For too long patient safety has been compromised by placing a higher priority on other objectives, most set by Ministers and national NHS

organisations. Overcrowded and understaffed wards are commonplace, but nobody has the courage to stand up and say enough is enough. We will only provide safe care whatever the politically unsavoury consequences.

The demand for health care is rising but it must be managed so that the NHS concentrates on that which works and that which is clinically most important.

Patient safety has on occasion also been compromised by professional rivalry and the priority of protecting the reputation of health organisations.

Both must stop. Lawyers take note!

But what about all those involved. Is somebody looking after the relatives whose children were allegedly harmed?

The NHS still owes them a duty of care.

What about those leaders accused and under investigation. Are they Innocent until proved guilty? Who is supporting them whilst investigations continue.

Does the NHS owe them a duty of care?

All this is of course separate from the media and political pressure to review Letby's conviction.

If the conviction is overturned [which still seems unlikely] it may make the evidence against the leaders stronger.

In any case Cheshire Police may still bring further murder charges against Letby, The final decision lies with the Crown Prosecution Service.

Sadly, Chester is not alone.

Other NHS Trusts are also facing police investigations about corporate manslaughter.

It is time for the leaders in the NHS to think again about patient safety.

The NHS cannot allow overcrowded, understaffed wards to become the norm, targets that put patient safety at risk adhered to at any cost, or professional rivalries that compromise safety to continue.

Tough decisions and choices will have to be made.

Not by ministers but by NHS Boards, managers and professional leaders on the ground.
