

Professionals Against Child Abuse express support for David Southall

Professionals Against Child Abuse (PACA) is astonished that Mr Justice Blake considered David Southall "was speculating on non-medical matters in an offensive manner entirely inconsistent with the status of an independent expert" by accusing a mother of murder when the senior and independent social worker present at the time testified that he did not do such thing, stating in her report "I am certain that Professor Southall did not make such an allegation during that interview".

When any doctor interviews parents after a death of a child, they have to consider the possibility of natural and unnatural causes. Since April, 2008, this has been a statutory role as part of the Child Death Review process in England. Indeed, Southall was instructed as an expert to undertake this interview by the Family Court, from where we have heard no hint of complaint. It was the mother who complained; her allegation had been previously assessed by a panel of three paediatricians and a former director of social services in 2000 as

part of an investigation by Southall's employer. The mother's allegation was found to have no basis.

Doctors involved in child protection have been subject to flawed disciplinary hearings in recent years by the General Medical Council (GMC), a body that we believe has been improperly influenced by a skilful and hostile media campaign driven by parents who face child protection investigations and their supporters. The GMC should never have brought this case. Last year, the Annual General Meeting of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health voted to express grave concerns about the Fitness to Practise procedures of the GMC.

The action of the GMC, now endorsed by Mr Justice Blake, further deters paediatricians and other professionals from engaging in child protection. Yet the UK's Secretary of State for Children, Schools, and Families, Ed Balls, last week stated that "the paediatrician...should act to put the child first and not be deceived by parents covering things up". Even with a senior independent chaperone, the doctor is now inadequately protected.

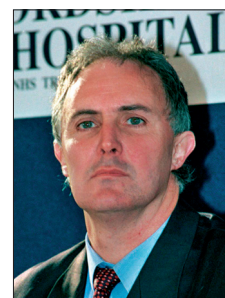
PACA believes the High Court judgment to be flawed and hopes this case will go to the Court of Appeal.

PACA wishes to see professionals engaged in child protection able to carry out their role knowing that any complaint will be properly and skilfully investigated. Although there should be debate about the systems for best safeguarding children, medical regulation must not include disciplining those acting in good faith and deemed competent by their peers.

We are all members of Professionals Against Child Abuse. The signatories include paediatricians, lawyers, a nephrologist, dermatologist, anaesthetist, gastroenterologist, psychologist, and an engineer.

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