

News Release

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Psychologists press for “patients first” in Mental Health Bill

As the Government's Mental Health Bill encounters its second reading this afternoon in the House of Commons, psychologists are pressing MPs to put the interests of people with mental health problems first in their considerations, rather than those of sectional interest groups.

Whilst welcoming the overall shape of the Bill as it stands, influenced by earlier input on a number of amendments in the Lords, the British Psychological Society still has significant concerns over one particular amendment to come down from the Lords which, it claims, will undermine the delivery of multidisciplinary mental health care in the future.

The British Psychological Society is strongly opposed to the amendment to the Bill which requires that the responsible clinician must consult with a Doctor, if they are not one, before renewal, extension or revocation of compulsory powers.

The Society considers that this amendment, with its emphasis on medical pre-eminence, undermines the professional ability of psychologists and other members of the multidisciplinary teams in mental health services to carry out clinical assessments and duties which are clearly within their competence.

While the Society supports the intention to offer stronger protections for patients who may be deprived of their liberty under the proposed new regime, it believes that there is a danger that this particular amendment overlooks the reality of the treatment and management of some client groups by healthcare professionals other than Doctors, a view shared by UNISON, the Royal College of Nursing and the College of Occupational Therapists.

Professor Peter Kinderman who has spearheaded much of the parliamentary work on the issue for the Society said; “Psychologists, nurses, psychiatrists, occupational therapists and social workers all have clear roles to play in the care of mental health patients and it is in the best interests of the patients for them to work together to deliver multidisciplinary care. Working as part of a multidisciplinary team we would expect professionals to consult with each other on the most appropriate course of treatment – but it should not require a Doctor to sign it off.”

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