

# national information forum

Working for the inclusion of disabled and other disadvantaged people  
by encouraging better information provision

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*A Digest of Current Social Information  
For members of the National Information Forum*

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## LATEST DEVELOPMENTS ON ASSISTED DYING

The summer issue of Dignity in Dying's magazine *Campaign* reports on the possibility of further action against Dr. Howard Martin who earlier this year was struck off by the General Medical Council. Dr. Martin's malpractice, which he admitted, was to hasten the deaths of 18 terminally ill patients in his care. When charged with the murder of three of them in 2005, he was said to have acted out of Christian compassion, and was acquitted. The case, argues *Campaign*, again highlights the need for assistance for terminally-ill patients, as they approach death, to be regulated. Otherwise, "doctors and patients will continue to take matters into their own hands without the transparency, support and safeguards that assisted dying legislation would bring".

In the same issue *Campaign* directly takes issue with the views of Baroness Jane Campbell. Jane, the convenor of 'Not Dead Yet UK', is quoted as saying "Disabled and terminally ill people need help and support to live, not to die. We cannot allow others to speak for us; especially those who seek to offer us the choice of a premature death. It is not a choice – it is to abandon us." This is emotive stuff. As 'Dignity in Dying' points out, the reality is that opinion polls consistently show that many disabled people support assisted dying legislation. A British Social Attitudes survey from 2007 found that 75% of them support assisted dying for terminally ill people, while a Disability Rights Commission poll in 2003 found 60% of disabled respondents to be in favour of a change in the law. More recently, a YouGov poll found that disabled people were equally likely to support assisted dying as non-disabled people.

**Ann, herself disabled, who was awarded an OBE in 2002 for services to disabled people, opposes resistance to assisted dying legislation and has signed up in support of Dignity in Dying's case. Two episodes of the BBC's hospital 'soap' *Casualty* (July 31 and August 7) dealt with this issue in what we thought was a balanced and sensitive way, emphasising the significance of choice.**

## A CHARTER FOR EYE CARE

On 15 June, David Blunkett MP introduced a new charter for eye care and sight loss services called 'You and Your Vision'. It sets out what should be expected from professionals involved in eye care.

More information at [www.vision2020uk.org.uk/UKVisionstrategy](http://www.vision2020uk.org.uk/UKVisionstrategy) or by



**calling 0303 123 9999.**

### **LIBERATING THE NHS?**

The Coalition's White Paper, *Equity and excellence: liberating the NHS* can be found at [www.dh.gov.uk/liberatingthenhs](http://www.dh.gov.uk/liberatingthenhs).

### **LISTEN UP!**

This is the title of a new report published by the Care Leavers' Association in which 310 adult care leavers aged 17 – 78 express their views. This research begins to set out some of the data about the care leaving community that until now has been unknown. So far, research on care leavers has focused on the 16 – 21/25 age range and we therefore know next to nothing about their later lives (other than by exploring records of historic abuse). The report covers a wide variety of areas, including the demographic make-up of the respondents (age, gender, disability, location, marital status, children, education, employment, wage etc).

**Available from the Care Leavers' Association, [www.careleavers.org](http://www.careleavers.org); tel: 0845 308 2755; e.mail: [info@careleavers.org](mailto:info@careleavers.org).**

### **40 YEARS ON**

The 40th anniversary of the passing of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act was celebrated on 17 June by a debate in the House of Lords. Described in 1970 as a 'Magna Carta' for disabled people, the Act laid the foundation for a revolution in the nation's thinking about disability. But, as Lord Morris of Manchester pointed out in the debate, "we still have much more to do to turn humane precept into practice and to make it our bounden duty to meet that challenge".

**Full debate at [www.publications.parliament.uk](http://www.publications.parliament.uk)**

### **TRANSLATING PRECEPTS INTO PRACTICE**

The Office for Disability Issues (ODI) is consulting on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, ratified by the previous government on 8 June 2009. ODI is seeking views from disabled people on the implementation of the Convention, including:

- Why you think that the Convention is important for disabled people?
- What you think disabled people and others need to know about the Convention?
- How you think information about the Convention should be provided?
- What you regard as the three main areas in the Convention that the government should be focusing on in order to ensure that disabled people can enjoy rights under the Convention?

We hope that in determining priorities the ODI will hearken to the work of ADD International. This respected charity uses its 2009 Annual Review to focus specifically on the Convention. Its mission is to translate those rights into practice. It points out that disability and poverty remain inextricably linked, and that despite the UN Charter over 80% of the 650 million disabled people worldwide live below the poverty threshold.

Here in Britain, a recent survey conducted by the Spinal Injuries Association (SIA) revealed that 58% of respondents regarded themselves as being in fuel poverty. The SIA magazine, *Forward*, suggests that if taken across the whole spinal cord injured community this could mean that around 24,000 people with spinal injuries are in fuel poverty. We are concerned that the Coalition's focus appears to be on cutting back support for disabled people. As winter approaches there is surely a legitimate need, despite our financial difficulties, to consider positive action to improve the lives of those affected by chronic disadvantages. The message must surely go out that help for disabled people needs to be enhanced, not eroded. Perhaps the new Minister for Disabled People, Maria Miller, MP for Basingstoke, could find time to respond.

**If you have views on the ODI's questions, or other Convention-related issues, please email: [odi.international@dwp.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:odi.international@dwp.gsi.gov.uk). More at [www.officefordisability.gov.uk](http://www.officefordisability.gov.uk).**

### **CHILD ABUSE: A RISING CAUSE FOR CONCERN**

The reporting of recent tragic cases has focused attention on a malignancy lying beneath the surface of our

society; one that appears to be growing. National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) statistics show that, in 2009, 36,610 children in England and Wales were the subject of child protection plans, an increase of 30 per cent on the total on the registers of 2005. The charity has announced (12 July) an eight-fold rise in online reporting to its helpline about suspected child abuse, following a major website refresh ([www.nspcc.org.uk](http://www.nspcc.org.uk)). The BBC reports an estimate that one child dies every week in England and Wales as a result of physical abuse. Babies are particularly vulnerable, being five times more likely to be killed than children of other ages. Teenage violence is also rising. Figures from Victim Support in one London borough (Southwark) show domestic abuse against girls under 19 accounting for more than half of its teenage caseload. Vigilance is the order of the day. The NSPCC helpline can always be contacted on 0808 800 500 (voice), 0800 056 0566 (text), e.mail: [help@nspcc.org](mailto:help@nspcc.org).

### **THE WHEELCHAIR SERVICE: STILL NOT FIT FOR PURPOSE**

In the fifth edition of our *Directory for Disabled People* (1988) we referred to sweeping changes to Disablement Services Centres following a highly critical report by a working party chaired by Professor Ian McColl. It was hoped that a reorganised management structure would facilitate stronger links with occupational therapy, physiotherapy and rehabilitation services already operating within the NHS. The intention was to encourage a quicker and more flexible service for disabled people. The Wheelchair Service, which had often been found slow and unresponsive, came in for particular criticism.

22 years later we are dismayed to tell a similar story. But rather than take our word for it, we give you verbatim extracts from criticisms aired by the Care Services Minister, Paul Burstow, during a debate in the Commons (28 June). The Wheelchair Service, he said, is “an area that really does require improvement: real improvement in how wheelchair services are commissioned and delivered, and real improvement in extending personalisation to wheelchair services, where there is still far too much off-the-shelf of ‘like it or lump it’ provision...the experience for many people is a poor one. The service is characterised by long waiting times...[and] by considerable regional variation – in assessment, procurement, and choice for the individual. Quite simply that is unacceptable...in preparing for this debate, my jaw nearly hit the floor when I read that 57% of wheelchair budgets currently go on back-office costs. Fifty-seven pence in every pound that the taxpayer puts into these services fails to reach the front line at the moment. That is not acceptable; it is not a good way to use our taxpayer-funded resources for the health service.”

On the positive side an advisory group chaired by David Colin-Thomé is looking at the wheelchair service, and the coalition government (Burstow is a Lib-Dem) will be pursuing a pilot programme specifically to examine the commissioning of wheelchairs and seating services.

**Of course, you can read the whole debate at [www.parliament.uk](http://www.parliament.uk)**

### **SOURCING LEGAL INFORMATION**

The summer issue of *Refer*, the journal of the Information Services Group of CILIP, has a valuable article on locating sources of legal information and advice. Of widest interest for anyone seeking general information on a legal topic are the websites [www.venables.co.uk](http://www.venables.co.uk) (Legal Resources in the UK and Ireland) and [www.infolaw.co.uk](http://www.infolaw.co.uk) (Infolaw), both with extensive links.

### **DETENTION OF IMMIGRANT CHILDREN**

In *News Briefing no.22* (June 2010) we welcomed the Coalition’s commitment to end the detention of children for immigration purposes. The summer issue of *Liberty* is similarly impressed, but reports that the organisation will nevertheless be intervening at the High Court in a case concerning the detention of children in immigration removal centres. It notices that although Home Office ministers have repeatedly stated that children should be detained only in exceptional circumstances and very close to their removal from the country, evidence suggests that this is not happening in practice. It notices that families are often detained for lengthy periods of time, only to be released back into the community, raising the question as to why their detention was deemed necessary in the first place.

**Bail for Immigration Detainees (BID) and the Children’s Society are also prominent in the campaign to**

**end the immigration detention of children. More at [www.biduk.org](http://www.biduk.org).**

### **GYPSIES AND TRAVELLERS TO BE RECOGNISED AS AN ETHNIC GROUP**

The June issue of *Gypsy Roma Traveller* reports the important news that in completing the 2011 Census (to be held on 27 March) 'Gypsy or Irish Traveller' will be one of the choices to best describe an individual's ethnic group or background. The lively magazine suggests that while history has taught gypsies and travellers to keep their heads down and mouths shut in public, many have concluded that the time has come "to stand up and be counted". For its part, the Office of National Statistics is keen to get the information out to gypsy and traveller communities. They can be contacted at [SMC.Team@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:SMC.Team@ons.gsi.gov.uk).

### **PAINKILLERS MAY PROLONG LIFE**

Commonly used painkillers like Ibuprofen do not increase the risk of heart attack in the elderly population, and may even prolong life, a study claims. Researchers found that the use of these drugs, also called non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), was also associated with a lower risk of death although they are not sure why.

Their findings, which appear in the *British Journal of Clinical Pharmacology*, were based on a study which looked at a nationwide hospital and pharmacy prescription database of 320,000 Australian veterans. Researchers looked at anti-inflammatory drugs that, with the exception of Ibuprofen, generally require a prescription.

Despite the findings, Professor Arduino Mangoni, who led the study, would not advise people to take painkillers regularly unless they are necessary. "Further prospective studies are urgently required to investigate the impact of NSAID use on these outcomes and the mechanisms involved."

**Edited from *All Together Now*, August-September 2010**

### **OPEN DATA**

The concept of open data is that, as far as possible, data should be freely available without copyright or other restrictions. We are often perplexed that important information which needs to be circulated as widely as possible is frequently protected with the © mark. An article by Jane Inman in the summer issue of *Refer*, the journal of the Information Services Group of CILIP, reveals that several local authorities have followed the Government and the Greater London Authority in setting up open data sites. The Government site is at [www.data.gov.uk](http://www.data.gov.uk). The initiatives, says Jane, have been reinforced and encouraged by a pledge from the new Prime Minister to introduce a 'new right to data'. One of the first steps has been to publish the salaries of the 172 civil servants earning more than £150,000.

**Refer is free to members of the Information Services Group. Otherwise go to [www.cilip.org.uk](http://www.cilip.org.uk), and search for Refer.**

### **THE DEATH OF OSMAN RASUL**

It is of course illegal to assist suicide. Yet in the case of Osman Rasul, who is reported as jumping to his death from a tower block after losing a fight for legal aid, was not assistance a reality? Are not the suicides of such asylum seekers induced by hostility and lack of support?

### **WE HATE NO. 33: MISOGYNY**

*"La donna è mobile,  
qual piuma al vento,  
muta d'accento  
e di pensiero."*

Piave/Verdi: 'Rigoletto'

Misogyny goes back a long way. A contributor to Radio 5 Live recently explained that the reason women should not be ordained as Anglican bishops can be found in "the inspired word of God". The first book ascribed

to Moses, called Genesis, tells the familiar story. How, having formed a man from the dust of the ground, God planted a garden eastward in Eden and put the man (Adam) there to look after it. God then decided that it was not good that the man should be alone and that he would make a “help meet” for him. Thus, having caused Adam to fall into a deep sleep, he took one of his ribs and made a woman (Eve) and brought her to Adam. After Eve’s deception by a serpent, and both having eaten forbidden fruit, we come to the reckoning: God tells the woman “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee” (Ch.3/16).

Surah IV/34 of the Koran, similarly inspired, asserts that “Men are in charge of women, because Allah hath made the one of them to excel the other” (Pickthall’s translation, 1977). It may be that such reasoning is nowadays restricted to religious fundamentalists, but it has shaped attitudes to women for centuries and is by no means dead.

In our own country, through history, there has been a wide acceptance that the role of women is subservient to that of men, tied up with childbirth, mothering and domesticity, with an implication of inferiority. They have commonly been seen to excel – and that only in youth – in being more decorative and in a capacity to attract. We chose the opening quotation because it captures part of the problem. The libidinous Duke of Mantua (in Victor Hugo’s book on which the opera is based it was King Francis I of France), having had his way with Rigoletto’s daughter, reflects that woman is fickle, blown in any direction, simple in speech and simpler in mind. And this notwithstanding his own admitted inconstancy. To the misogynist male there is often a dichotomy between desiring women as sexual objects, while lacking respect for their wider endowments, and not otherwise enjoying their company or discourse. Perhaps uncertain of their own masculinity, or fearful that the patriarchal society is under threat, they seek reinforcement in being with other men.

The word ‘misogyny’ derives from Grecian sources, and Wikipedia is strong on literary and philosophical allusions to misogynistic characteristics. Euripides (480-406 BC) is among those so identified, but Sophocles is quoted as saying: “He may be so in his tragedies, but in his bed he is very fond of women.” There is no such reservation about Menander (342-291 BC), who asserted: “there are many wild beasts on land and in the sea, but the beastliest of all is woman”. Similarly, the dissolute Roman Petronius (27- 66AD) saw women as “one and all a set of vultures”.

Absolution from the paradox of desiring women while hating them is not uncommonly sought by casting females as temptresses. Do they not go out of the way to exhibit and enhance their charms? Can men then be blamed for succumbing to their irresistible allure? Are women then, at heart, merely harlots, impure and defiled? Is it not, therefore, understandable that men should hate them? In this construct men are seen as hapless and innocent victims, open to the wiles and manipulation of feminine seduction. An unfaithful wife is a whore; the unfaithful husband merely a philanderer. The frequently quoted Otto Weininger, in his *Geschlecht und Charakter* (1903) argued: “No men who really think deeply about women retain a high opinion of them; men either despise women or they have never thought seriously about them”. Somewhat, we suggest, a sweeping statement. By the same measure we might think deeply about men and conclude that they are shallow and so obsessed with football as to be seen, even when full grown, in replica shirts bearing the names and numbers of their heroes, displaying beer-bellies and emitting primordial cries. Nevertheless, even in relatively enlightened countries, there is a persistent view that women as a group are intellectually inferior to men. Photographs of ‘summit’ meetings of world leaders show almost wall-to-wall men. Angela Merkel is usually the exception that proves who rules. In Britain it required a monumental struggle to secure votes and educational opportunities for women, and even today they are underrepresented in business and politics. There are some cracks in the glass ceiling, but by and large it remains intact.

Yet the climate is changing. Until recently, there has been little opportunity for women to step outside their role as procreators and mothers. But now they are increasingly able to take control of their lives and to limit their families. Julianna Margulies as Alicia Florrick in *The Good Wife* epitomises the new woman. Forced by circumstances out of a conventional role as a wife and mother she takes a position in a high-powered law firm, emerging as a powerful, yet entirely feminine, litigator. The transformation has high profile parallels in the real world. Our present Home Secretary, Theresa May, and the current leader of the Labour Party, Harriet Harman,

exude authority without the usual macho overtones. Even Australia, famous by reputation for misogyny, now has a woman, Julia Gillard, as prime minister (at least at the time of writing). And one, according to the *Daily Mail*, who is proudly feminist, agnostic, unmarried and childless. Misogyny is now inextricably linked to equality issues and, in England and Wales, we have an Equality Act that outlaws discrimination, harassment and victimisation. To redress long-standing political imbalance it is here now legally acceptable to have all-women short lists. And the visible evidence of brilliant young women from South Korea in the British Open Golf Championship shows that even that bastion of male domination is yielding to the reality of female emancipation. The pin-striped Taliban of the City and Westminster had better watch out.

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**This information sheet has been compiled by Ann Darnbrough and Derek Kinrade. The views expressed do not necessarily represent those of the National Information Forum. Earlier News Briefings and the 'We Hate' series are available on the Forum's website: [www.nif.org.uk](http://www.nif.org.uk).**