

Protesters speak out against NHS

Emotions ran high when parents and loved ones gathered outside the headquarters of the BMA to voice their frustration and lack of confidence in the National Health Service.

SPEAKERS, led by Dr Rita Pal, called upon the British Medical Association (BMA) to institute rigorous guidelines to govern the practice and administration of the so called Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) policy that has recently been exposed for its gross shortcomings. A coffin, symbolising the victims of involuntary euthanasia, floral tributes, photographs of loved ones, anger and tears, were all part of the passionate plea.

Among the demonstrators were a couple, whose son Stephen, was the victim of a DNR order. The order was authorised by a RGN, despite the fact that the BMA states that a nurse acting alone cannot make an unauthor-

ised DNR decision. A wheelchair user, born with spina bifida, Stephen nevertheless enjoyed an active and full life until he began to experience classic symptoms of meningococcal disease. A delay in treatment through the misdiagnosis of his illness resulted in a DNR notice being applied. It would appear that the authorities have condoned this action as no statement to the contrary has been issued.

When asked about the issues and implications of DNR for disabled people, Dr Pal commented: "I have been taking an interest in the Stephen Hill case and the implications of DNR and I feel very strongly about the

treatment of disabled people." She added: "Disabled people are entitled to have the same rights as anybody else, yet decisions are being made based on gross misunderstanding and preconceived ideas of what it is like to be disabled and the quality of life people with disabilities are able to enjoy. I have actually seen disabled people not being understood by doctors. If you have cerebral palsy or any disability that makes communication difficult, then decisions will be made for you – the assumption being that you are unable to understand. The tragedy is many disabled people are extremely intelligent and need the doctors' support to be able to carry on with their lives."

Dr Pal is convinced that her father, who had brain damage due to a stroke, was in the end "written off" by the NHS. "I remember doctors talking about my father in front of him as if they were in some way invisible. In the end it was down to me to fight for his rehabilitation and battle against these attitudes."

It would appear, in the light of Dr Pal's insights into the treatment of disabled people, it is essential for both patient and carer/guardian to discuss the issue of DNR with the medical consultants and doctors at the time of admittance. It would also be wise to check medical notes and records regularly to make sure an unwanted DNR order hasn't appeared without your knowledge.

Both the BMA and the Department of Health declined the opportunity to comment on the demonstration.

NICK HULL-MALHAM



Dr Rita Pal (left) supporting the coffin borne by demonstrators making their way to the BMA headquarters

Join the fight . . . Following the recent exposure of DNR (do not resuscitate) notices on certain