

Press Release 27 Feb 2010:

The Clinical Human Factors Group is an independent body, set up as a non-profit making organisation. Our goal is to increase awareness within clinical practice of human factors and how it can be used in the reduction of clinical error.

The Mid Staffs Inquiry has highlighted, not for the first time, systemic problems within the culture of the NHS. The fundamental problems identified at Mid Staffs can be seen in varying degrees all around the country, with clinicians struggling to provide a safe service whilst managers worried by government targets push for faster, cheaper results. Of course the NHS needs to be able to balance productivity and safety and good processes allow both to be achieved. But as other safety critical industries know, when circumstances conspire to make only one achievable, safety must come first. Health professionals must be encouraged to speak up; and perhaps more importantly those above must be encouraged to listen. It's a salutary lesson that all safety critical industries have learnt, in virtually every disaster there were voices trying to say "no", but no one bothered to listen.

Surely now is the time for the NHS to see the advantage of using a permanent team of independent investigators to review unexpected deaths in the NHS as a way of learning and picking up early trends, in the same way as the air and rail industries have used for years. Understanding how and why tragedy occurs is surely the one area of common ground for all those harmed – patients, clinicians, and managers.

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