

# FACULTY OF FORENSIC & LEGAL MEDICINE

of the Royal College of Physicians of London



Registered Charity No 1119599

Press Release from the Faculty of Forensic & Legal Medicine 1300h 30<sup>th</sup> April 2015

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Faculty of Forensic & Legal Medicine notes the concerns raised within the BBC news report (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-32492773>).

The issues raised are not just regional. Detainees in police custody are a highly vulnerable population and require appropriate healthcare support which is provided by variously, doctors, nurses and paramedics who should be trained (but are often not) to the standards laid down by the Faculty of Forensic & Legal Medicine ([www.fflm.ac.uk](http://www.fflm.ac.uk)).

It is self-evident that inadequate numbers of healthcare professionals and delays in assessments will increase the risks to health to those in police custody. There is a real possibility, that without proper thought and oversight, that the imminent complete transfer of police custodial medical services (sometimes known as forensic medical or forensic healthcare services) to the NHS, will paradoxically result in worse staffing and poorer standards, following the trend in some parts of the prison service, whose figures released today show an 11% increase in prisoners self-harming, and an increase in deaths from natural causes after a period of overall improvement.

There appears to be a view from all political parties that there are no votes in issues regarding the healthcare of detainees in police or prison. Such detainees however could be anyone of us at some time in our lives (as many high profile individuals in politics, journalism and other media have found). It must be an essential priority for any incoming government to ensure that such police medical services are urgently reviewed by the incoming government's respective Home Office, Justice and Health ministers (probably initially via the Health Select and Home Office Select Committees) to prevent an irremediable decline in such services which will inevitably result in more preventable deaths and harm in custody, and, in the light of other forensic work carried out by the same healthcare professionals risks of miscarriages of justice.

The Faculty of Forensic & Legal Medicine will continue to seek to raise standards for healthcare of detainees and for other aspects of forensic & legal medicine at a time when the core principles of such care have already been severely eroded.

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