

Letter to Virginia Bottomley

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Thursday 16th January 1992
Springfield Hospital

from

61 Glenburnie Road

London SW17 7DJ

Dear Mrs Bottomley,

I wrote to you 19 days ago on matters of great import concerning your department and have not received a reply, not even a cursory "Mrs X thanks you for your letter and has noted its contents". Perhaps you dismissed my words as the ramblings of a mental asylum inmate and binned them? A brief phone call to Carole and Andrew, your friends, would have sufficed to allay your doubts, but no, you chose to ignore my letter. Well, I have more to say – should you require a copy of my earlier epistle please do not hesitate to ask.

My comments of 19 days ago still hold true and far from improving, the general situation has indeed deteriorated since then. Just 3 days ago for our breakfast there was no tea, no coffee, no butter, no margarine, no bread and no sugar – please think of us sometime over your muesli and poached egg won't you? Whilst I am delighted to report that I had my second change of sheets this morning in 5½ weeks I regret that they were unable to provide a clean duvet to replace my existing one which reeks of stale urine (not mine either). The washing machine which conked out soon after Christmas has fortunately just been repaired – thank heaven for small mercies.

More importantly I have to mention some individual cases which must come under your aegis as number 2 in your department. The

most horrifying was the man at Springfield who around New Year's Day started getting severe chest pains – an ambulance was called and he was driven down to the nearby St. George's Hospital, I hope you know the one, it's your showpiece NHS hospital for South West London – you've closed most of the other ones. On arrival he was turned away because the doctors there don't want the loonies from Springfield on their wards. I have to report that he died in the ambulance on the way back. I quote your boss speaking on the 14th January ... "more and better care is being extracted from the resources available and in a more efficient manner". Oh yes, Mr Waldegrave ? One expects more from Eton/Christ Church men, let alone fellows of All Souls. Why does he tell such porkies and massage his facts ? We all remember there are lies, damned lies and statistics ... his reforms are working well are they ? Not here they aren't.

Let us move to the private system. BUPA not only won't pay for my stays in mental hospitals but I understand now they won't pay for any psychiatric care whatsoever. I assume private hospitals do come under your remit as well ? Being connected to health as they are, although I am told extracting money from them for treatments received often causes more anguish than the illness itself. I have another medical case to bring to your attention and the name may well ring a bell with your husband. A close friend of mine called Mark Faber, who was about your husband's vintage at school and played cricket for Sussex in Tony Greig's era, undertook a fairly routine operation to remove a varicose vein that had troubled him for some years. This was about 12 days ago ... something obviously went wrong in the operation, Mark screamed in agony but no doctor came for one hour and he died. And that is the private sector.

Back to Springfield – why is it that these human beings are denied access to non-psychiatric doctors ? They suffer from physical ailments just like you and I and yet their G.P.s

become non-persons once they have crossed this threshold. There is a lady here who is 64 but looks 94 (you should see the cocktail of drugs swilled down her throat every night), she is incontinent at both ends, she slobbers continuously, her clothes stink permanently, she has a gout-like swelling on one ankle and her lungs are feeble. This is long-term care under your blessed NHS. She has no teeth and consequently is nigh impossible to understand, she can't even eat a sandwich without spewing it out. There is a dentist on site, some 300 yards away who could fix her up with some dentures but does he move ? No. She needs a doctor badly, not a shrink, or she will die soon.

I reckon someone could present a good case against your department for gross negligence or at the very least driving without due care and attention. I am sure it is now possible to sue the government; there is that wise man who is currently tackling Norman Lamont and his team at the Treasury. He followed government advice regarding small businesses for 11 years and eventually went broke – well I could have told him a thing or two about your counterpart at the Treasury, John Patten, who came as a supply teacher to Eton in my time. I well remember his lectures on the economics of imports/exports which were so nonsensical they were almost farcical. What a dismal science it is. And if that man has reached such an exalted position in government, God help the rest of us ! My apologies for being somewhat rude but one can't help becoming angry in a place like this.

By the time you get this letter you will have had 3 weeks to muse over the first one and had it been an electricity bill you probably would have been cut off by now. I want to see some action, and I want to hear some truths from you and Mr Waldegrave – no political double-dutch, no side-stepping the facts. None of this “the NHS is safe in our hands” lark because very clearly at the moment it isn't.

This is my last time of asking. I want answers.

Yours etc.

Jamie Summers

c.c. Bernard Levin

Reply from Virginia Bottomley, 27 January 1992:

