

NEWS

Wife's treatment in India 'better than Glasgow'

By Auslan Cramb and Kate Devlin

A ROW broke out last night over the state of Britain's hospitals after a retired consultant complained that his wife received far better treatment in India.

Opposition parties accused Labour of running down the NHS and failing to put patients first.

The dispute was sparked by the contrasting experience of Mark Ziervogel, 70, and his wife Toni, 66, in hospitals in India and Glasgow. She received specialist treatment in two medical centres in India after suffering a serious head injury when she fell off a bicycle in Rajasthan in February.

Her husband, a former consultant radiologist, said the hospital in Ajmer, where she was seen by a neurosurgeon and given CT scans that revealed bruising to the brain, was "superb". He praised its cleanliness, the efficiency of the staff and the high standard of equipment.

After five days in intensive care she was transferred to the Max Super Hospital in Delhi and on March 6 she had recovered enough to be taken home to Scotland. She



Mark Ziervogel and his wife, Toni, who fell from her bicycle

was accompanied on the flight by an Indian doctor and nurse, and Mr Ziervogel said he "blushed" with embarrassment when the doctor walked into the "filthy" Western Infirmary in Glasgow.

He said it was more than four hours before his wife was given a bed on a surgical ward, and staff then told him that the hospital was not able to handle patients with head injuries who required rehabilitation.

She fell out of bed and broke her jaw during her

stay at the Western. She has since been waiting for five weeks for a bed to become available at the physical disability rehabilitation unit in the Southern General Hospital in Glasgow.

However, Mr Ziervogel praised the staff at the hospital for their "kindness and patience", and blamed the problems on bureaucratic "management and systems". He said: "Staff have provided Toni with the best care they can given the resources they have."

Dr Nanette Milne, the

Scottish Conservative health spokesman, said: "The Lib-Lab pact, despite the best efforts of NHS staff, is running our health service down. We will take politicians out of the running of the NHS and let the professionals do their job."

Shona Robison, the Scottish National Party health spokesman, said that after eight years of Labour and Liberal Democrat government, patients and health professionals deserved an NHS "fit for the 21st century".

The consultant, from East Dunbartonshire outside Glasgow, who formerly ran the X-ray department at Glasgow's Royal Hospital for Sick Children, also revealed that his wife's ambulance was kept waiting when it arrived at the Western as another emergency had just come in.

He said standards had declined in the NHS, adding: "It strikes me as strange that an acute receiving hospital with an A&E can only handle one case at a time."

"The Indian doctor was appalled. He was also appalled at the filthy and dirty aspect of the Western."

NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde said in a statement that a critical incident review into Mrs Ziervogel's fall was underway, and her husband was aware that he would be given an opportunity to "contribute to that review".

A spokesman added that Mrs Ziervogel had been accepted for transfer to the rehabilitation unit later this week.



BRIAN SMITH

A Tory plan for Greg Dyke, above, to challenge Ken Livingstone was rejected by the Lib Dems

Dyke out of London mayor race

By George Jones and Richard Alleyne

GREG Dyke, the former BBC director general, yesterday abandoned a plan to stand as London mayor after the Liberal Democrats rebuffed a surprise Conservative offer to field him as a joint candidate.

David Cameron, the Conservative leader, was left deeply embarrassed after the Lib Dems rejected the plan to challenge Ken Livingstone, who is seeking a third term.

Mr Dyke, who lost his job after the Hutton report into the death of the weapons inspector Dr David Kelly criticised the BBC, switched from Labour to the Lib Dems at the last election because he could not support a party led by Tony Blair.

Mr Dyke had several meetings with Mr Cameron, and signalled that he would be interested if he could stand as a "unity" candidate for the Liberal Democrats as well. Mr Cameron put the

idea to Sir Menzies Campbell, the Lib Dem leader, at a private meeting at Westminster yesterday. But Ed Davey, the Lib Dem leader's chief of staff, immediately went on television to announce that the idea had been rejected.

Mr Dyke said that getting agreement between the parties was the only way he could win. "I always thought it was a long shot and I just decided that I am not going to do it."

HIV blood tragedy was avoidable, inquiry told

By Telegraph Correspondent

THE tragedy of thousands of haemophiliacs who contracted life-threatening diseases after being exposed to contaminated blood products should never have happened, an inquiry was told yesterday.

Victims and relatives gave emotional accounts about living with HIV and Hepatitis C following "the worst treatment disaster in the history of the NHS", according to Lord Winston, a fertility expert.

Nearly 2,000 haemophiliacs exposed to the viruses more than 20 years ago have died and many others are said to be terminally ill.

Yesterday, an investigation began hearing testimonies. Sue Threackall, 54, of north Devon, whose husband Bob died in 1991, aged 47, after contracting HIV following the use of a clotting agent, said: "I shouldn't actually be here today. None of us should."

"Warnings were ignored, lessons were not learned and our community was lied to by the people it should have trusted most."

Haemophilia is a disorder where the blood does not clot properly. In the 1970s a method for producing clotting factors was found but, unlike earlier methods, plasma donations were pooled.

During this period some blood products came from US suppliers who paid what became known as "Skid Row" donors for their blood - those more likely to be infected, according to the Haemophilia Society. The hearing was adjourned until next month.

Vacancy as B&B partner seeks early pension

S PARE a thought today for Mr B, a skilled worker who finds himself forced into early retirement at the age of only 53.

There is no problem about Mr B's pension: his trade is in the happy position of being able to vote for its own publicly-funded pensions, which are set at a correspondingly generous level.

But consider the pain and sense of rejection Mr B must feel as he finds himself supplanted, absurdly, by another Mr B who is already 56 years old, and will be not as good at doing the first Mr B's job.

This is the intolerable predicament in which Tony Blair finds himself.

We apologise, by the way, for ripping aside the veil of anonymity with which we had hoped to hide the Prime Minister's identity, but the situation is now so desperate that



Andrew Gimson Commons sketch

only the maximum possible publicity can save him from the humiliation of having to make way for an older and less popular man.

David Cameron called on Mr Blair to repeat last year's endorsement of Mr Brown, when the Prime Minister said: "I'm absolutely happy that Gordon will be my successor."

Mr Blair refused point blank to repeat those words: a refusal which is significant, for it shows he has not abandoned hope of thwarting Mr Brown. As Mr Cameron put it: "The

interesting thing is that he will not endorse the Chancellor... what does the Prime Minister think is wrong with him?"

This question riled Mr Blair, who launched into an almost hysterical attempt to get even with Mr Cameron: "The right honourable gentleman has some experience of the economy, has he not?"

"He had something to do with the British economy once, back in 1992, did he not? He was the special adviser to the Chancellor of the time - we remember Black Wednesday."

This was desperate stuff. Everyone knows that Mr Cameron was only about 12 years old when he worked for Norman Lamont, and had absolutely no influence on the economic policy which led to Black Wednesday.

Mr Blair praised Mr Brown's management of the economy and also maintained that the

Chancellor had given the Tory front bench an "absolute and comprehensive drubbing" in Tuesday's debate on pensions, which was not the impression of most people who watched it.

But if Mr Blair thinks so highly of Mr Brown, why will he not endorse him as his successor?

It is an unanswerable question, because the truth is that Mr Blair and his friends have an unprintably low opinion of Mr Brown.

The Prime Minister informed the House that he will comment on the succession in due course: "I will make my statement at the time I decide to stand down."

How kind of Mr Blair. In his last weeks he is beginning to sound like a grande dame who is being evicted from her mansion, but is determined to maintain the fiction that she is leaving of her own accord.

Mr Brown's following on the Labour benches has swollen in recent weeks. It is sad to see the party which allowed itself to be kicked around by Mr Blair for 13 years embracing the same fate at the hands, or feet, of Mr Brown - not that the next kicking will last as long.

Mr Cameron looked remarkably patrician as he surveyed the Labour benches, and not quite able to conceal his satisfaction.

They are alarmed by his success, hate what they take as his condescension, and barracked him as he started on the subject of pensions.

The Tory leader dealt with them by pointing out that, since they themselves are going to receive "fat pensions", they really ought to listen as he described the plight of those who are going to get nothing.

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