

## **The CQC's failures and follies. How far can we blame its senior officers?**

In a blog of 1/10/18 John Burton took to task senior executives of the CQC. He cited more examples of their clumsy misjudgements and then avoidance of discussing the consequences.

I can't judge the specific allegations here because I don't work in social care. But I do know that many similar allegations and disputes are now common in NHS healthcare, where I have worked as a doctor since the end of the 1960s (a similar workspan to John Burton).

Throughout the NHS, too, there are many reports of large, commercially-based organisations knowing how to game the system, while smaller, more nakedly honest and vocational services are more easily found 'inadequate', taken into Special Measures, or even closed – all these despite clear objections from those who know and use the service most.

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For several years I have heard, increasingly, of similar problems from right across our Welfare services: health and social care, all levels of education, probation ...

Wherever the inspection regime becomes the supreme influence, its subject professionals – 'service providers' (what a soulless and dehumanising term!) – feel either demoralised and deskilled, or – to survive – become detached and cynical. Among these wearied and disheartened Welfare workers I hear two common

refrains. They are: 'We can't carry on like this!' and 'You've just got to play the game!' ...yet how can they both be true?

Faced with this impossible situation Welfare workers buckle: some leave, some stay but sicken, some endure with principled stoicism. But many – to survive – develop a chilling capacity for expedient detachment.

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And has rolling out this juggernaut of inspections and micromanagement really improved our Welfare? The evidence is very doubtful. What seems much more certain is that it is only those who administer the system who (seem to) believe in its effectiveness. And often – as John Burton suggests – they are either blinded or corrupted in the process.

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A good system is one that is most likely to bring out the best in us, while a bad system does the reverse. This is true irrespective of the claimed intent of the system: *the road to hell is paved with good intentions.*

So I can believe that many current senior officers of our micromanaging inspection regime – and its original architects – meant well. They never intended our current plague of bureaucratic deskilling, officious intimidation or humiliation. They did not intend the demoralised weariness that leads to submissive resentment and then a detachment either from the spirit of the work or the work itself (why else do so

many sicken or leave?). They did not intend gaming the system, the often-shocking perversion of human sense by so many procedures, or the rising tide of colleagueial mistrust and alienation to which they, too, are now victim.

Yet this is what our increasingly ratcheted inspection regime has yielded us. Until we recognise that this is a systemic problem – a bad and unsustainable culture that feeds off serious misconceptions – we will all – inspectors and inspectees alike – suffer from it.

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And what are these misconceptions? Well, in brief, they are mostly derived from believing that we can manage *all* our complex and vulnerable human Welfare with the same kind of mindset and interactions that we employ in our manufacturing industries. As we can see, this can have tragic consequences, something I have named, in an article, [From Family to Factory](#).

If you are interested in reading more about these misconceptions, they are in a letter I wrote to *Caring Times* (too long for this blog), entitled *Playing the ball not the player*. *The CQC as Zeitgeist: an alternative view*. You can find both of these on my [Home Page](#): the article is number 31, the letter is 95.

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