



Royal College of Psychiatrists' briefing on Section 152 of the Coroners and Justice Bill – February 2009

The Royal College of Psychiatrists is seriously concerned about the proposals in Section 152 of the Coroners and Justice Bill, which is currently in Committee stage in the House of Commons.

Clause 152 amends the Data Protection Act to allow Ministers to issue "information sharing orders" which allow information to be used for purposes for which it was not gathered. This appears to allow the sharing of confidential personal health data, which is an unprecedented and dangerous step.

We urge MPs to seek assurances from the Government that the proposals set out in Clause 152 will not allow the sharing of personal health data.

As a membership organisation with over 13,000 psychiatrists, covering the whole of the United Kingdom, our primary concern regards the healthcare data of people with mental health problems.

The issue of confidentiality with regards to people with mental health problems is a particularly important one. Mental health issues, where stigma continues to attach, must be recognised as one of several areas where patient information is of a particularly sensitive nature.

Patients with mental health needs therefore may have understandable anxieties about the sharing of personal identifiable information for purposes and for distributions they have neither known of nor consented to.

Four particular groups require specific consideration:

- Patients who are suspicious or paranoid
- Patients within the criminal justice system (or with histories of the same)
- Patients with particular privacy needs (for example high public profile, witness protected)
- Patients with impaired decision making capacity.

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