

SUBMISSION FROM TOM WIGHTMAN

1. An Autism (Scotland) Bill is essential. The one currently proposed does not go far enough, and can only be viewed as a start in the right direction.
2. I have an autistic son who is 30. After having been badly abused by Scottish mental health practitioners, and ourselves being the targets of veiled threats (of sectioning), he is now safely housed and cared for with dignity and respect in England, where we can visit him as often as we are able.
3. A few things have improved for the protection of people with autism who show violent tendencies or other 'abnormal' behaviours. For instance, there is now the opportunity to take ones fears and grievances to a tribunal – but only if the person is sectioned. However, it should never get to that stage. What opportunities are there for those who are not sectioned? Would the Bill provide this much needed protection?
4. All psychiatrists should be properly trained in the problems that autism brings. I know (from bitter experience) that in the past, even when they said they'd been trained, they hadn't taken any of that training on board and just blatantly didn't want to understand, consequently no respect given to parents and other carers, or their patient. No account was taken of other physical problems, such as: leaky gut, inability to cope with toxins (medication), food intolerances, among others. Maybe there is the prospect of enlightenment round the corner with the new strategy.
5. Unfortunately, those who hold the purse strings are the very ones who don't want to find out about autism and how it affects, not only the person with autism, but the whole family and anyone else they come in contact with - schools, doctors, dentists, opticians, social services, to name but a few. Autistic people deserve to be treated with dignity and appropriate services provided for them to ensure that they have a meaningful and fulfilling life. Not only that, but if there were adequate services provided, all of the other affected peoples' lives would be greatly improved as well. Strangely enough, this could actually be cost-saving in the long run - providing respite from constant problems, mental breakdowns, physical illnesses, absence from work, breakdown of families and a whole lot more.
6. Just as an example: it is clear that there is very little provision for proper long-term accommodation for the vast number of autistic people who currently need it - never mind the huge numbers that there are going to be in the future. We should be starting to set things up now, so that we get it right for when the onslaught begins. Current carers, parents, other family members won't be able to do this work on their own forever. They're all getting older. If services aren't provided as a matter of course, then there is going to be tragedy, when a whole raft of new services are required in the ensuing emergency.

7. What frightens me and other parents is 'WHO WILL LOOK AFTER MY CHILD WHEN I AM DEAD'? Will they care enough to do it right? Will they be given enough funding to be able to do it right? Some people with autism can and do look after themselves with little or no help. Others may require accommodation separate from other people, with plenty of space, and with 24-hour care and lots of tailored activities and appropriate socialisation. It's a huge spectrum and each individual has their own requirements. So many of the services provided for people with learning difficulties are totally inappropriate for those with autism. If someone is blind, you don't provide them with services that are appropriate for someone who is deaf, do you?
8. I'm looking forward to a time when autism and aspergers syndrome are properly catered for. There is a need for support in so many areas: diagnosis, education, housing, getting work, keeping a job, being socially accepted, stop the bullying (calling it low-level crime is not acceptable), proper medical care, freedom from over-medication, respite for the person themselves and for their carers. Does the strategy cover all of this?
9. We do need an autism bill. If these services are not put on a legal footing, they are not going to be provided. In the current financial climate, if the services are not already available, then they are not going to be set up. Anything that isn't required legally, will not see the light of day. We do need this Bill – but, it has to be strengthened. What is the point of making it a duty to provide a strategy, but not enforce the actual provision. It doesn't make sense.
10. Autism is not a mental health issue and it is not a learning disability issue. It is an entirely different category and should be treated as such. Yes, there are situations which need the input from both, but they are not, in actual fact, part of the underlying condition. In order to provide the correct services, this fundamental understanding has to be accepted and the provision of services has to be made from a very different perspective. It would appear that other agencies could also make use of autism services, if they were available. For example: prisons – where there are large numbers of undiagnosed prisoners with autism or autistic tendencies.
11. How dare those service providers and “experts” say that legislation would take services away from other disabled people. That's what autistic people have been suffering all this time. They've been shuffled from pillar to post, with no-one taking responsibility. That has kept costs down – at least, in the short term. This initiative should have no bearing on funding for other disabilities. This initiative has been denied to autistic people for too long. It must be funded separately. It must be under a legal footing and it must be now. Without it, there is a disaster waiting to happen.

Tom Wightman
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