

Compassion Control?

Margaret Williams 2nd September 2006

There can be few in the international ME community who are unaware of Professor Simon Wessely's views about ME, namely that it does not exist except as a false belief that is amenable to behavioural modification techniques. Such a view is in defiance of the published evidence that ME is a serious and complex multi-system disorder.

Equally, there can be few who are unaware that despite extensive evidence to the contrary, Wessely decrees there is no such disorder as Gulf War Syndrome.

Wessely has now gone on public record as stating that Private Harry Farr, one of 306 young UK soldiers, some as young as 17 – all of whose names were listed in the Daily Telegraph on 16th August 2006 -- who were shot at dawn for alleged cowardice in the First World War whilst suffering from severe shell shock should not have received the posthumous pardon recently granted by the UK Government.

As is widely known, on his own admission Wessely has a long-time fascination with military matters and he is now Co-Director of the King's Centre for Military Health Research at King's College Hospital, London; he is also Honorary Civilian Adviser in Psychiatry to the British Army.

It is on record that Wessely is the son of a Jewish refugee who, in order to avoid persecution under the Nazi occupation of Czechoslovakia in World War II, fled his country and settled in the UK: indeed, in 2003 the TV personality Esther Rantzen – herself Jewish – presented a TV documentary in which, under the auspices of The Association of Jewish Refugees, she took Wessely's father Rudy Wessely, then aged 77, back to the homeland from which he had fled in fear (see also the Journal of Jewish Refugees, March 2003).

Many will be aware that one of the young soldiers to receive an official pardon was Private Harry Farr, whose tragic story has lately featured prominently in the news, his descendents having campaigned for 90 years to have the charge of cowardice expunged from his military records.

The facts are stark: Private Farr was a Regular soldier aged 25, not a volunteer, who had fought bravely in the trenches for his country for two years. He had been shot and wounded in the leg. He had endured two of the worst campaigns before the Battle of the Somme even began but was then hospitalised on three occasions suffering from severe shell shock before becoming totally unable to continue fighting on 17th September 1916, when he finally lost his nerve completely. Even his commanding officer acknowledged that Farr's nerves had been destroyed. Farr was arrested and subjected to a court martial that lasted just 20 minutes, at which he had no-one to represent him, the doctor who had

previously treated his shell shock having been severely wounded. Farr was ordered to be shot at dawn for cowardice and was executed on 18th October 1916 at Carnoy. The chaplain who witnessed the execution said Farr refused to wear a blindfold and went to his death with his dignity wholly intact (see “The victim of a war beyond modern day comprehension” by Ben Fenton; Daily Telegraph: 16th August 2006, page 4). Farr, clearly deeply traumatised, was not a coward but an extremely brave man.

As an Editorial on 16th August 2006 in the Daily Telegraph noted: “These were not rational deserters but men driven mad by suffering. The pardons reflect a welcome change to our attitudes to life and death in battle”.

Wessely does not agree: he says Private Farr should not have been pardoned.

Following publication of his article “[The life and death of Private Harry Farr](#)” in the current Journal of The Royal Society of Medicine (JRSM:2006:99:440-443), on 2nd September 2006 Wessely was [interviewed](#) on the [BBC’s Today programme on Radio 4 by John Humphrys](#) immediately before the 8am news.

Wessely was introduced as a “leading psychiatrist” and Consultant to the military. It was repeatedly put to him by Humphrys that Private Farr was clearly ill and incapable at the time, but Wessely repeatedly rejected this and was adamant that there should have been no pardon for Farr.

Wessely seemed incapable of understanding the difference between outright refusal to carry out orders and the complete physical inability to do so on the part of Farr.

Lord (Alf) Dubs, a Labour peer since 1994, argued against Wessely’s view that nothing was to be gained by such a pardon, saying that the pardon was helpful to Private Farr’s family, but Wessely did not accept this.

When Humphrys again pointed out that Private Farr had been too sick to obey orders, Wessely replied that the rest of the battalion hadn’t wanted to go over the top either, but they did, and many died, whereas Private Farr had refused.

It was inescapable that Wessely seemed to be saying that it had been acceptable to shoot people for “cowardice”, even though such people were incapable of action through being mentally destroyed by the sheer terror of war. Since Wessely has never been on active military service, is he best qualified to stand in retrospective judgment on anyone who has been deployed?

Wessely’s views on Private Farr’s pardon are also reported in the Times on 2nd September 2006 on page 20: “Psychiatrist says pardons for ‘cowards’ ease our pain” by Michael Evans.

For those wishing to hear the broadcast for themselves, it is accessible at

http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/today/listenagain/ram/today1_20060902pardon20060902.ram

Many who heard this broadcast are likely to have been profoundly shocked at Wessely's seeming callousness and total lack of compassion.

There will, though, be few in the ME community who would have been surprised, because it is the same Wessely who for the last two decades seems to have shown no compassion for those incapacitated by ME/CFS and who has ensured that Government bodies continue to abuse such patients by refusing to accept the validity of their suffering as a legitimate disorder, thus denying them benefits upon which they depend for survival.

It is Wessely who advises Government on who is allowed to be "sick" and on what constitutes "sickness": running through the decades of his articles and reports is one glaring theme, namely that it should be *doctors* such as himself who wield control over who is and who is not sick and that only *doctors* should have the power to control the population, to which end he is actively involved in the deliberate creation via social constructionism of "psychosocial" illness by indoctrination of State agencies (see "Proof Positive?" by E. Marshall and M. Williams at http://www.meactionuk.org.uk/PROOF_POSITIVE.htm).

Wessely's wish to control seems chillingly linked to the Blair Government's obsession with exerting control over every aspect of peoples' lives, the latest such example being the Childrens' Index, which will afford ready access to hitherto private information on every single child in the UK (even from before birth) to hundreds of thousands of civil servants, doctors, teachers, the police, social services etc via a comprehensive communal electronic database, ostensibly so that potential criminals can be marked out and targeted; many informed people already fear that uncontrolled access to such information will put every child at unprotected risk from paedophiles, as reported by Sarah Smith in the documentary "30 Minutes" that was broadcast on 1st September 2006 by Channel 4.

Has the age of compassion control arrived?

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