

# Reinstate Karen Reissmann

## nurse and union rep sacked for speaking out.

Karen Reissmann, UNISON activist and community nurse, has been sacked by Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust. She was sacked for speaking out about cuts in the NHS.

### The charges.

- 1) Karen was interviewed for an article opposing the transfer of NHS care to the voluntary sector. She is alleged to have criticised a partner organisation for paying nurses less and offering less favourable pensions hence finding it harder to recruit more experienced staff. For this she was found guilty of seriously affecting the reputation of the Trust she worked for.
- 2) She told people she had been suspended and what for.
- 3) She told people she was innocent.
- 4) She allowed the press to print misleading statements about her case.

All of these were deemed gross misconduct charges and she was found guilty and sacked for each one.

UNISON members were outraged to hear of her sacking. **NHS staff in all 10 community mental health teams and the 3 crisis resolution teams are on indefinite strike action to demand her reinstatement and the right of all of us to speak out without fear.** The majority of UNISON members involved are nurses, administration workers and occupational therapists.

Karen has been a community psychiatric nurse in the Trust for 25 years. She is well respected by patients and staff alike. None of the offences related to her clinical work. **On the day she was suspended from work she received a letter informing her that she had been successfully promoted to the post of senior nurse practitioner.**

### **Dr Alex Theodossiados, Consultant psychiatrist**

"I am shocked to hear Karen Reissmann is suspended. I know for a fact and personal experience that she has worked beyond the call of duty and has dedicated herself to the welfare of her patients and colleagues."

### **Alan Hartman, ManchesterUsers Network.**

"Karen has always been a champion of her clients. She has always fought tirelessly to make sure they got the benefits, services and help they were entitled to"

### **Paul Abbott, creator/writer of Shameless**

"Karen Reissmann who fights and speaks out for the Mental Health service deserves our full support. I cannot believe that the NHS no longer allows debate and criticism of its policies. Mental health is the poor relation of the NHS, but as more and more people experience mental health difficulties, it should not be. If it was not for people like Karen prepared to fight for quality services, it would be a third-world service. Mental health services and staff need more respect than ever now. Karen should be reinstated immediately."

### **A statement of support from the UNISON Health Group Executive on the suspension of UNISON member Karen Reissmann**

Karen Reissmann, a leading trade union activist at Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust has been sacked by her employer. Karen is the UNISON Chairperson of the Manchester Community and Mental Health Branch and an elected member of the unions National Health Group Executive. The Health Group Executive is deeply concerned that Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust has taken this harsh measure against a respected nurse and trade union official

UNISON will vigorously defend our members right to speak out without fear of persecution and we will ensure that Karen will be supported throughout this process and that her interests will be positively defended.



All her alleged offences relate to her trade union activity and her speaking out against government policies and local cuts.

Karen has been a union activist for a long time. She is a passionate defender of the NHS and its staff and its patients.

She is the branch chair and a member of UNISON's national health service executive.

### **Manchester's mental health services are in crisis.**

- Manchester's mental health services were officially rated 173<sup>rd</sup> out of 175 mental health Trusts in a recent inspection.
- When Withington hospital closed and moved to Wythenshawe we lost 45 beds.
- We have a bed crisis, where it is very hard to get a bed for people even when they are very unwell. Patients are on waiting lists to be sectioned. Occupancy in adult beds is 127%. Patients still are being put up in day and TV rooms. We have operated on red status for beds for over 3 years.
- PFI beds in Wythenshawe hospital cost 4 times as much per bed as NHS beds in North Manchester.
- This has led to overspending and recurrent debt.
- Occupancy rate is 120%+, which means we regularly have 24 patients in 20 beds.
- Recent changes in community mental health teams have cut community mental health teams massively. Eg in Karen's team they went from 16 to 4 nurses, from 7 to 4 senior support workers and from 2 to 1.5 occupational therapists.
- This change has therefore left over 500 patients without the key worker nurse they need, despite warnings from senior staff and unions.
- New services, like crisis teams cannot open, because of this problem.
- Over 1000 patients have had to change their key worker.
- This year they have closed an elderly ward.
- They have also closed a respite centre on a Friday afternoon at no notice, sending patients home to carers who had been expecting a weekend off.
- They employed a consultant who was on the sex offenders register.
- They employed a locum consultant who was not qualified.
- Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust is officially in "turnaround", similar to "special measures" in schools.
- The medical director resigned in summer.
- The Trust has to save over £5 million this year.

It is these sorts of issues which have seriously affected the reputation of the Trust. It is these issues which UNISON and Karen have been fighting against.

UNISON believes the sacking of Karen is an attack on their union and an attack on the NHS. Manchester Mental Health and Social Care Trust is ranked one of the worst in Britain is officially in "turnaround". It has to make over £5 million more cuts this year. These are cuts UNISON has and will vigorously oppose.

The mental health has also come in for criticism from relatives of William Scott who claim that he committed suicide after losing his support worker in the disputed reorganisation. William lived in the north Manchester area, where community mental health teams had their nursing staff slashed from 16 to just four, and support workers cut from seven to four.

We believe the sacking of Karen is an attack on her human right to freedom of expression. People do not have to agree with what she says. But she is a union representative and if union reps cannot speak up on their members behalf, who can? What sort of NHS will it be if staff cannot speak out? Who will be the real losers?

In mental health, in particular, it is not easy for users to speak out and be heard. UNISON and Karen have a long tradition of working jointly with users to campaign over bus passes, pressure to work, cuts in service and user rights. This tradition cannot end.

This is an attempt to intimidate other stewards from opposing and speaking out against cuts in service. The chief executive has already said in an internal memo that she wants an end to the bad news stories. **The way to stop bad news stories is to stop having bad news. Not just to stop them being told.**

Unison has a proud history of opposing cuts in Manchester's mental health services. In January a campaign, culminating in a 2 day strike, stopped over 40 potential redundancies and down-gradings of community staff. We carried on campaigning against the cuts in team numbers. It is this campaign which has so riled Trust bosses.

#### **How much are they prepared to pay to beat the union?**

- 1) The chief executive who sacked Karen, applied for her job advertised at £110,000 but this was increased to £135,000 because of she was deemed "exceptional". Sheila Foley went on holiday to Dubai on the same day the indefinite strike started.
- 2) She employed 2 external private consultants to investigate Karen.
- 3) She employed a private HR for the hearing.
- 4) On the first 2 sets of strike rather than discuss emergency cover with the union, they closed 3 wards. They sent 30+ patients on leave. They sent 17 to a private secure hospital in Bury where patients were searched on the way in. They sent 21 patients to a private hospital in Darlington over 100 miles away for 17 days, with no idea when they would return. It is estimated this cost £300 - £1000 per patient per day.
- 5) They have now hired 20 beds in a private hospital in Cheadle for the community nurse strike.
- 6) They have employed a PR firm to help sell their actions.

None of this money is available for normal patient care, but suddenly becomes available during a dispute. Staff feel furious that their patients can normally wait for beds, can normally wait for community care and we are not supposed to say anything, but when the union stands up for patients and staff rights, extra money is magically found.

### What can you do?

- 1) Raise the issue at your next branch meeting, and invite strikers to come and speak (to arrange speakers ring Richard on 07737 300859)
- 2) Send a donation to their strike fund "Manchester Community and Mental Health UNISON" c/o union office Chorlton House, Manchester Rd, Manchester M21 9UN.
- 3) Send a protest to Sheila Foley Chief Executive Sheila.foley@mhsc.nhs.uk
- 4) Send protest to Alan Johnson, secretary of State for health [johnsona@parliament.uk](mailto:johnsona@parliament.uk)

For more information contact

Andy Gill UNISON regional office 0161 211 1000

Or Karen Reissmann, branch chair 07972 120 451

Or Caroline Bedale, branch secretary 07931 152 001

## **Solidarity Meeting**

**Reinstate Karen  
Reissmann  
We have a right to fight  
NHS cuts.**

**Wednesday 14<sup>th</sup> November  
7pm, Mechanics Institute,  
corner Princess St and Major St,  
Manchester**

## **Demonstration Reinstate Karen Reissmann**

**Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> Nov**

**1pm Peace Gardens,  
bring banners and friends.**

