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Tragic scoliosis child's mother tells of 'gut punch' she felt reading the language used to wrongly justify denying her son surgery

'CHI MEDIC DISMISSED HARVEY AS NOT FIT FOR A SNEEZE'

TRAGIC Harvey Sherratt Morrison's mother said she could not 'believe what I was reading' when she received a report that said her son was refused surgery because he 'was not fit for a sneeze'.

The shocking description is contained in a protected disclosure by a whistleblower

EXCLUSIVE

By Valerie Hanley

to the Health Service Executive, which is currently under investigation.

In their disclosure – seen by the Irish Mail on Sunday – a former Children's

Health Ireland (CHI) employee claimed a senior medic deemed Harvey was 'not suitable for surgery' as he was 'palliative'.

The whistleblower claimed the medic told them: 'Patient X [Harvey] was not fit or ready for surgery, not fit for a sneeze.'

In an interview with the MoS this

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Kelly's SIX bikinis for jungle

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‘Harvey is not the only child with scoliosis to die soon after surgery... it’s a massive mess’

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weekend, Gillian Sherratt said the disclosure suggests her eldest child was allowed to die and taken off the urgent surgery list without her knowledge or consent.

Describing the moment she read the description of her little boy, she recalled: ‘I was at home when I read what was in the protected disclosure and I just remember it felt like such a gut punch. It was one of those moments, you know, where you can’t quite believe what you are reading.’

‘We knew there had to be an explanation [about why Harvey was removed from an urgent surgery list] as to what had happened, but I wasn’t quite expecting that. Because from what I read in the protected disclosure, it implied that the plan for Harvey was just to literally... just to do nothing and allow him die.’

The mother-of-three expressed disbelief at the ‘disgusting’ language used to describe Harvey’s health status in the disclosure.

‘The not fit for a sneeze thing was definitely... quite derogatory, I think that’s what was hard because we obviously

‘Anyone who knew Harvey just adored him’

loved Harvey so much, and anyone who knew Harvey just adored him. To have someone use that kind of language in relation to him was to us just disgusting.’

Harvey, who had scoliosis, was placed on an urgent list for spine straightening surgery in February 2022. At that stage, his spine had a curvature of 75 degrees.

But 30 months later, in August 2024, his parents discovered their son had been removed from the list without their knowledge or consent.

In the intervening period, the curvature of Harvey’s spine worsened, from 75 degrees to 110 degrees. By the time he eventually had an operation in November 2024, his spine had curved to 130 degrees. Harvey died eight months later.

Until recently, Harvey’s mother and his father, Stephen Morrison, only had questions and no answers as to why their son was mysteriously removed from the spinal surgery list.

HSE chief executive Bernard Gloster and the director general of the Workplace Relations Commission are investigating the protected disclosure, which claimed Harvey was ‘not suitable for surgery’ because he was ‘palliative’ and ‘not fit for a sneeze’.

Palliative is the term used by medics when someone is nearing the end of their life and there are no further medical options to be pursued in the hope of securing a recovery.

According to the whistleblower,



INQUIRY:
Jennifer Carroll MacNeill

‘Harvey will be like a North Star, at the top of our Christmas tree to guide us this year’

TRAGIC Harvey Morrison Sherratt will be his family’s ‘North Star’, guiding them as they prepare to spend their first Christmas without him, his heartbroken mother said this weekend.

Gillian Sherratt admits the festive season will be a difficult one for her family, especially as what would have been Harvey’s tenth birthday follows quickly afterwards, on January 15.

Following their meeting with Gillian and her husband Stephen Morrison this week, the Taoiseach and Minister for Health announced they intend to bring a memo to Government recommending a statutory inquiry into the care of children who have scoliosis, spina bifida and hydrocephalus.

Gillian and Stephen want to get answers to questions about why their first-born child was taken off an urgent list for spinal surgery without their knowledge or consent.

Despite their heartbreaking loss, Harvey’s parents are nevertheless determined the pending statutory inquiry will have the power to finally get to the bottom of the failings in the

By **Valerie Hanley**

treatment of their son, as well as the ‘hundreds if not thousands’ of other children.

In the meantime, Gillian and Stephen are preparing to spend Christmas with Harvey’s sister Lyra and little brother Remy.

‘I try to keep it in perspective, it’s just one day – but every day is hard’

And for them, the first year without Harvey is particularly poignant as he did not get to spend his last two Christmases with his siblings.

‘It’s incredibly sad,’ Gillian told the Irish Mail on Sunday. ‘Obviously Christmas was always one of my favourite times of year, but Harvey didn’t get the last two Christmases

because Harvey was in Temple Street.

‘The thing that only hit me the other day was that Remy, who is about to turn three, he hasn’t actually spent a Christmas with Harvey since he was one month old.

‘So he will have no memory of spending Christmas with Harvey, because Harvey went in with sepsis on Christmas last year and he went in with respiratory distress on Christmas Day the year before.

‘Christmas is always one of those occasions when there was a lot of hype and then suddenly Harvey would always get sick. Myself and Stephen haven’t spent Christmas together in three years.’

While Christmas is a particularly difficult time for

MEMORIES: Gillian Sherratt with Harvey, Lyra and little Remy



grieving parents, the brave mother and advocate is trying to keep it all in perspective.

‘It’s just one day, and I think obviously it will be hard, but I

think every day is hard with it.’

And while Harvey will not be physically with them this year, their beloved son will be at the very centre of the family’s Christmas Day.

‘Literally, all he needed was a scan’

Street agreed that Harvey was palliative and not “fit for a sneeze”.

‘He was fit for surgery once bone density was satisfactory. They were waiting – literally all he

needed was a scan.’

After meeting with Harvey’s parents this week, Tánaiste Simon Harris and Health Minister Jennifer Carroll MacNeill confirmed there will be a statutory public inquiry into the care of children with scoliosis and spina bifida.

The inquiry will investigate the care given to all children with spina bifida, scoliosis and hydrocephalus, possibly dating back to 2005.

While dealing with their heartbreak since Harvey died aged nine in July, his parents campaigned tirelessly for a statutory inquiry to ensure other families do not have

to go through what they and the parents of ‘hundreds, if not thousands of children’ have endured.

Gillian stressed the inquiry must be ‘completely independent of CHI and the HSE’.

She said: ‘There hasn’t been an inquiry [into the care of children with scoliosis and spina bifida] to this point. There have been many small investigations looking at very specific things... so far, none of the reports or investigations have been completely independent of CHI and the HSE.’

‘We can’t keep allowing them [health authorities] investigate

themselves, to decide themselves where the people doing the investigations are to look, because obviously then they will point them in the direction they want them to go. All the others [investigations and reports] have been quite small. None of them have had the power to compel, and that was the big thing for us, that participation in this cannot be voluntary. Anyone and everyone that is deemed necessary and is called upon to give evidence and has to hand over documents.’

In an acknowledgment of the suffering of many other families in a similar situation, Gillian said she does not want the inquiry to be named after Harvey.

‘I wouldn’t, just because one of the biggest things we are trying to stress is that Harvey is just one child in this massive mess.

‘We are hoping the inquiry will go back as far as 2005. You are talking hundreds, if not thousands, of children. A number of children have died in recent years, specifically shortly after scoliosis surgery and

‘Caught between a rock and a hard place’

honestly I don’t think I’d feel right, because their failure and their suffering was just as great.

‘It’s just that Harvey has got more publicity. There’s been a huge number of children let down and still let down, and my concern is... it sounds callous, but there has been too much focus on Harvey specifically. This will be an inquiry into the care of all children with spina bifida and or scoliosis and hydrocephalus.’

While the inquiry could take years to complete its work, Gillian said she is hopeful there will be better outcomes for children before it delivers its final report.

‘It’s a huge undertaking, but the expectation would be that where the inquiry is ongoing and as issues are found, issues can be addressed while the inquiry is going on,’ she added.

‘That would be our expectation, that they wouldn’t wait until the inquiry is finished to enact change. They might find a glaringly obvious issue with the inquiry in year one... they shouldn’t wait until year three to address it. It would just further allow these children to be neglected if they handled it that way.’

Ms Carroll MacNeill said a considerable body of work will be required for the inquiry and that a facilitator will be appointed to scope the content of potential terms of reference in collaboration with stakeholders.

It is expected the minister will bring a memo recommending the statutory inquiry model to Cabinet

Tánaiste’s ‘little bit of accountability’ for broken promise

By **Valerie Hanley**

TÁNAISTE Simon Harris yesterday said he accepts ‘a little bit of accountability’ for failing to keep a promise to slash surgery waiting lists for children with spina bifida and scoliosis.

The Fine Gael leader was widely criticised for failing to deliver promises he made when Minister for Health in 2017, that no child would have to wait more than four months for spinal surgery.

He faced calls to resign and a vote of no confidence in the Dáil, which the Government won by 94 votes to 65.

After meeting with the parents of little Harvey Morrison Sherratt this week, the Tánaiste expressed his backing for a full public inquiry into the treatment of children with spina bifida and scoliosis.

But when asked yesterday if he accepts there would be no need for an expensive and protracted statutory inquiry if he had fulfilled his political pledge, Mr Harris insisted he acted in good faith, based on advice given to him at the time by Children’s Health Ireland and the Health Service Executive.

Speaking on his way to a Fine Gael Agricultural and Rural Development conference in Newbridge, Co. Kildare, Mr Harris told the Irish Mail on Sunday: ‘We had a really good meeting, myself and the Minister for Health, with the parents of Harvey Sherratt and also with the scoliosis representative groups and family representative groups and I’m grateful to them for



ANGER: Simon Harris promised to slash spinal-surgery waiting lists

their time. Back in 2017 I gave a commitment in good faith that was given to me by the HSE... both the HSE and the CHI, the chief executive, then director of the HSE, gave that commitment to me.

‘The chief executive of the HSE gave evidence at the Oireachtas Health Committee many, many times, as did the then CEO of the CHI. I also gave that commitment by the way, and while that commitment resulted in many more children getting surgeries – you saw the number of surgeries increase – it never reached where I desperately wanted it to go. Successive ministers continued to keep that as a target.’

But he acknowledged: ‘I do believe though... I fully accept a little bit of accountability in relation to that.’

this week. Asked if she thought the Government were shamed into action, Gillian replied: ‘I don’t think embarrassed [is the word] I would use.’

‘I feel they were caught between a rock and a hard place with nowhere

CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL Page 8

else to go. I think that it should have happened long before now and I think there is regret that they didn’t do this sooner.’

The HSE would not comment on the ‘derogatory’ language allegedly used to describe Harvey’s condition in the protected disclosure.

A spokesman said: ‘In accordance with the Protected Disclosures Act, the HSE cannot comment on individual protected disclosures.’

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