

## Ashya King: lessons to be learned

The parents of 5 year old Ashya King were released from a Spanish prison after a European arrest warrant against them was cancelled; this arose following their actions to smuggle him out of Southampton General Hospital and travel to Spain, believing he was not getting the best care and that his condition would deteriorate. They wanted Ashya, who has a brain tumour, to receive treatment at the Proton Therapy Centre in Prague.

However, the full force of the Law immediately swung into action, involving the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and the Hampshire Constabulary. The couple were arrested, handcuffed, separated from their son and thrown into prison, simply for loving their son and wanting the best possible treatment for him.

### **Justice for the Kings**

Only after a sustained cry of public protest ensued, involving the Prime Minister, were the parents reunited with their desperately ill son. By now the child was confused, depressed and lying alone in a foreign hospital, adding to the family's anguish.

Mr King said: "We want to help our son get through this bad time because he hasn't got too many months to live and we're locked away in a cell..." Mrs King, said: "I just want to wet his mouth because he can't drink through his mouth, I want to brush his teeth, I want to turn him side to side every 15 minutes because he can't move."

Yet, he could still see and feel emotions. Would deprivation of a mother and father's comfort help Ashya? How would the little boy's confidence and trust be impacted long term? The story has touched the hearts of people worldwide. We have since learnt that the private clinic in the Czech Republic can treat Ashya.

### **Duty of care v parents love**

The CPS said the risk to Ashya's life "was not as great or immediate as had been originally thought." The parents had ordered specialist foods to care for Ashya, and had managed to charge the food pump. Doctors have a duty of care to do the best for their patients. Do loving, devoted parents also have a right to disagree with their decisions? Isn't there a case for decent common sense to prevail?

On the other hand, what sort of outcry would have happened if the doctors had let him go without a word and the boy had died? What would this say about his medical care? The parents have won their brave fight against the institutions yet only after the healthcare system, the police and prosecutors were ruthless in their pursuit of them.

Was their only crime to opt out of receiving NHS care? Having allowed their son to be treated by the NHS they couldn't escape its clutches and were punished if they dared to disobey the rules? Was this the fault of the doctors or a heavy handed NHS?

Should we question a healthcare system that, instead of apologising to the parents when they thought the service was not good enough, reacted with an unpleasant uproar?

Clearly, there are some lessons to be learned.