



From : The Earl Howe

Lucy Mackinnon
Hailsham Chambers
4 Paper Buildings
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London EC4Y 7EX

26th January 2007

Dear Miss Mackinnon,

LISA BLAKEMORE BROWN

I am writing in response to your request for a statement about Lisa Blakemore Brown to be given in evidence to the British Psychological Society. You asked me in particular to focus my remarks on her character, as well as her general mental and emotional bearing, as I perceive these to be.

I have known Lisa Blakemore Brown for about six years, having been introduced to her by Charles Pragnell, a retired senior social worker. I sought her professional advice on the specific issue of Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy, which I was then researching, and have since asked her to brief me on issues relating to autistic spectrum disorders. Lisa was recently asked by Dr Richard Taylor MP to act as an adviser to the cross-party group of parliamentarians, which he chairs, examining the Government guidelines on Fabricated and Induced Illness. I am a member of that group.

I have always found Lisa to be someone who, whilst having firm and clear views about a number of issues, such as those mentioned above, puts over her opinions in a measured, calm and careful way. Her book 'Weaving the Autistic Tapestry' provides evidence of this. You mentioned that she has been accused of being 'grandiose' and that, in blunt terms, she gives herself airs. In my experience these suggestions could not be further from the truth. Certainly I would say that Lisa is a person who believes passionately in righting injustice and exposing falsehood wherever she finds it. However I have never seen her as a woman with a giant ego. By that I mean that she is not the sort of person to deem herself to be above others or to show disrespect for people – even for those with whom she may disagree. She can speak with satisfaction of a job well done; but 'grandiosity' – for example in the form of throwing her weight about or boasting – is simply not in her nature.

I understand that doubt has been cast over Lisa's mental stability. I am not a psychiatrist and therefore cannot offer a professional opinion. However I am most surprised by this allegation.. It is true that since the start of disciplinary proceedings against her by the BPS, the strain on Lisa has been marked; but I would not say that her mental state has ever prevented her from going about her normal professional life in a focussed and rational way. The only time when I have been aware of Lisa being overtly emotional and unable to concentrate on things properly was when her daughter Lorna fell gravely ill. I found this wholly understandable. She believes that the allegations which the BPS are considering are trumped up. Given the seriousness and apparent intensity with which the BPS are pursuing the case, she has at times confided that she feels hounded. Frankly, I cannot blame her for having such feelings, whatever the basis of the allegations. It is a natural reaction. Lisa's normal demeanour is one of cheerfulness and good humour, and she has generally maintained this, despite the pressures put upon her. I have to say that 'unbalanced' is not a word I would associate with her.

The field in which Lisa operates is one which excites sharply differing professional opinions, often very strongly felt. I am aware of rival professional 'camps' and the regular and sometimes forthright interchange of views on the internet (for example on bmj.com). It is not wholly surprising to me, against that background, that Lisa should have attracted some opposition from certain quarters where opinions may differ from hers. As a parliamentarian I have learned never to swallow whole any advice that I am given, even by professionals, and I am cautious about making public use of such advice unless I can be confident that it is well-founded. In gauging the utility of the insights provided to me by Lisa, I initially felt it wise to set them alongside those of others, particularly when the issue (such as FII) is difficult and controversial. I would simply say, as regards Lisa's advice, that I have come to view it as immensely well-reasoned and valuable. I have never, thus far, felt it to be anything other than based on solid judgement and long professional experience.

I hope that the above observations will prove helpful.

Yours sincerely,

Howe

HOWE

Opposition Spokesman for Health, House of Lords