

Barclay announces government will introduce Martha's law in England

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husband, Paul Laity, had raised concerns about Martha's deteriorating health a number of times, but that these concerns were not acted upon.

A similar measure enforced in Queensland, Australia, has been shown to have saved lives.

Merope Mills welcomed the announcement, saying: "I met the secretary of state for health yesterday and welcome the news that he will introduce Martha's rule across NHS England hospitals.

He is prioritising its introduction and is ready to allocate funds to the initiative. It will be one standardised and recognisable right that will become part of patients' experience on hospital wards.

"A team has been appointed to work out implementation; we appreciate Stephen Barclay's commitment to work at speed in order to make Martha's rule happen as soon as possible. Our incredible daughter Martha lost her life needlessly, far too young. We hope this new rule will put some power back into the hands of patients and prevent unnecessary deaths."

Barclay said yesterday: "We are committed to it." He told BBC Radio 4's Today programme that Martha's was an "absolutely heart-breaking case" and that he was determined that "we ensure we learn lessons from it".



▲ Martha, pictured in 2017, 'lost her life needlessly, far too young', said her mother, Merope Mills

PHOTOGRAPH: MEROPE MILLS

He said the case Mills had set out was "compelling".

There were international lessons, particularly from Australia, that could be learned from, he said, adding: "I particularly want to give much more credence to the voice of patients, and I think a key part of this measure is ensuring that patients feel heard and can get a second opinion."

On how the rule could be introduced, Barclay said there was scope to move "much more quickly" in

terms of paediatrics, and that he had asked the patient safety commissioner, Henrietta Hughes, to convene NHS leaders to work with NHS England in particular to look at the proposals and to build on evidence from NHS trusts where there were already schemes.

"But to do so in a way that is easy to communicate to patients, so it isn't about having lots of different schemes across the country," he added.

Asked if it should be one rule across the NHS, he said there might be different circumstances around mental health settings or in the context of primary care.

"But within the cohorts, so for example in paediatrics, how do we have more consistency? Because I think the more standardisation we can have, the easier it is then to communicate to patients."

Barclay said it was important "in terms of the communication of this to families, that there is a degree of standardisation in how it is rolled out".

Asked if in hospitals there would be one Martha's rule, which would be advertised as such on posters and stickers, he said: "That's what I'm very keen on delivering and I have asked NHS England to work at pace on that."

He added: "I think that principle is established. What we want to do is work in partnership with the NHS in terms of how we deliver."

Asked how it could be funded, Barclay said: "We will prioritise in delivering this, and if you look at the cost of our clinical negligence bill obviously that is a huge cost more widely to the NHS."

"But I think it's more fundamental than this. I think if you hear the story of families, the incredible distress that people have experienced, the opportunity to prevent harm, which I know is something people across the NHS are absolutely committed to, I know NHS England are committed to, so I know they want to work in partnership and are committed to doing it."

"I think there is a lot of consensus in terms of the importance of getting this delivered. And I think there is scope for us to act more quickly in particular in certain areas within the NHS like paediatrics, so that's what we're doing."