

**MY RESPONSE TO SIMON WESSELY-  
SPECTATOR COMMENTS PAGE 27 AUGUST 2011**

<http://www.spectator.co.uk/features/7190703/mind-the-gap-3/>  
(Bottom of web page)

There has recently been a sustained and ongoing media campaign claiming ME/CFS sufferers and supporters are criminally harassing researchers. There are key problems with these articles/radio programmes:

1. The allegations themselves are unsafe. For example, an anonymous comment that "you will all pay" is deemed a 'death threat', when no threat is actually made, and the comment appears to denote instead a prediction of eventual accountability for mistreatment of ME/CFS sufferers. Ironically, David Cameron has used the phrase "you will pay" towards rioters recently, without it being deemed a 'death threat'.
2. There has also been a false categorisation of legitimate, non-criminal action by ME/CFS sufferers and their supporters (such as requests under FOI legislation, official complaints through various public agencies etc.) as 'malicious harassment', or 'abuse' or 'intimidation'. Legitimate actions are cynically juxtaposed with alleged acts of criminal harassment to construct non-criminal parties as harassers.
3. These articles/programmes then go on to misrepresent any objections to psychogenic dismissal of the illnesses diagnosed as ME or CFS. Reasonable objectors have been falsely deemed 'extremist', even crimina, but no chance is given to such objectors to put forward their reasonable positions.

I am a social sciences researcher and lecturer, and the parent of a person diagnosed with ME/CFS. In 2007 I was once falsely accused of 'personally harassing' Professor Wessely by a Wikipedia administrator, claiming Professor Wessely had told him this himself. I publicly oppose and critique psychogenic explanations for ME/CFS, on both a political and academic level. I have NEVER harassed Professor Wessely or contacted him, though he once wrote an unsolicited email to me, after a critical comment I made about flaws in psychogenic explanations was quoted in a parliamentary debate in 2004. When I wrote to Professor Wessely's employers, asking that he clarify he had no part in the false claims made on Wikipedia in 2007, they sadly refused to provide that clarification. A few weeks ago in the British Medical Journal, I found that people who wrote to employers were being falsely juxtaposed with alleged 'death threat' makers, as harassers. Perhaps Professor Wessely might clarify that point here?

I have also publicly and officially complained about a recent published trial of psychological 'treatments' in the Lancet (the PACE trial), and certain extremely unsafe (as in dangerous to patients) claims made from this trial. This is not harassment, unless any official enquiry, complaint, or public testimony counts as such, which it does not.

I'd like to take this opportunity to make another one of my public, legitimate, non-criminal disagreements with Professor Wessely here, and that is on the problematic attempt to conflate mind and brain, which is what is actually being advocated in the above article. There is a key tendency in deliberations around 'the mind' to perform a linguistic 'sleight of hand' (whether deliberately or unwittingly), which results in the mind (an abstract concept) being incorrectly presented as synonymous with the brain, and this call to mix up psychiatry and neurology is axiomatic of this. By this logic any signs or symptoms resulting from a lesion on the brain would be psychogenic (and not organic): because Professor Wessley and his colleagues do NOT think ME/CFS sufferers have a brain (neurological) disorder at all: their use of cohorts in which anyone with a sign of organic disease (including brain disorder) is deliberately selected out, by use of the 'Oxford Criteria' is testament to this: as is the magically voluntaristic approach of their form of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, in which ME/CFS patients with multi-system dysfunction are led to believe they can get

better by adjusting their beliefs; as is the belief in the concept of 'medically unexplained illness' in which a default explanation of 'psychogenic' is proffered.

A full delineation of the problems in the claim psychiatry and neurology are conflatable in regard to ME/CFS (let alone other illnesses) is outside the scope of a comments page. There is much more that can be written. The reasons ME/CFS sufferers and their supporters publicly object to the claims and beliefs of Professor Wessely and many others, and criticise their research, is because (a) these are often implausible, and (b) they have led to the adverse effects of psychogenic dismissal and construction as deviants, which include non-treatment of serious physical damage, and refusal of much needed benefits for seriously disabled people, as just two examples of many adverse effects.

ME/CFS (categorised by the WHO as a neurological illness) is also not the only disease in which a psychogenic misdiagnosis has led to death. One example in the literature is a woman with Creutzfeld-Jakob disease who choked to death because doctors thought her illness was psychogenic: her having had psychological difficulties with coming out as a lesbian, and a difficulty in finding organic signs (which were eventually found, but too late for the patient) leading to this fallacious conclusion.

I can offer referenced evidence sources to support my above assertions if readers are interested.