

Professor Simon Wessely and claims of harassment

PERMISSION TO REPOST

Below is a series of correspondence between myself Professor Peter McGuffin, Dean of Psychiatry at the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College, London, and John Williams, Interim Head of HR, at the Institute of Psychiatry, King's College, London.

I have transcribed the correspondence by both, but have the original documents in my possession.

The contents of this correspondence are self-explanatory.

I have published this correspondence for two reasons:

1. I consider that I have been defamed, and seek to protect my good name and reputation against defamatory attacks of this nature.
2. This situation, sadly, relates to an increasingly unpleasant and worrying phenomenon. I have observed, over the years, a growing tendency, by some, to make grossly ad hominem attacks on ME/CFS advocates and the community at large. These are logically indefensible, and morally and intellectually unsound: and have had the effect of preventing reasonable, legitimate voices of criticism being acknowledged within the discourse of ME/CFS politics. This has adverse consequences for sufferers, especially when such claims are accepted, unsubstantiated, at face value, by others such as politicians. This is a phenomenon which I will return to in the coming months.

Angela Kennedy
19th July 2012

1. Letter from Angela Kennedy to Peter McGuffin:

1st October 2007

Dear Professor McGuffin,

I am writing to you about a serious matter of defamation which potentially involves a member of your department, Professor Simon Wessely.

I am an advocate for my daughter, a young woman seriously ill and severely disabled by her illness, who was diagnosed with ME/CFS. I also politically advocate for the community at large. I am also a known critic of the 'psychiatric paradigm' of ME/CFS, and I undertake this from an academic perspective (I appreciate the above term might be contested, but that is not the issue at hand).

I am currently working towards publication on this issue, having been engaged in academic research for some years. I have a social science background and am an Associate Lecturer with the Open University (although the work I am undertaking in this field is not connected to this institution).

I therefore do have a reputation that might be damaged by libellous, defamatory comments.

In recent weeks, various editors of the Wikipedia online encyclopaedia have expressed an intention to publish claims that Professor Wessely has 'retired' from 'CFS' research because of 'harassment' by certain people within the ME/CFS patient community. The basis for these claims is the Gibson Report, an unofficial, unsourced, un-referenced document, which has been criticised for key inaccuracies, and inflammatory, inaccurate language about the patient community and its advocates.

I, with other advocates, have endeavoured to provide reasons and evidence as to why the Gibson Report is not a reliable source, and why claims of 'harassment' are, certainly at present, unsubstantiated and unsafe to

the point they should not be published on Wikipedia. One advocate has attempted to clarify, by contacting MP Ian Gibson himself, the source of the comment, within the report itself, that Professor Wessely has retired from "CFS" research, and the claim that this was "*possibly* due to extreme harassment" [my italics] present within the report. Ian Gibson's researcher is following this up.

This is an extremely important issue. I, like many in the community, would condemn harassment of academics (particularly harassment as defined in criminal law), particularly as I am myself an academic, and because I have been subjected to criminal harassment before, which I have reported to the police. However, there is also a problem around the use of the term 'harassment': ME/CFS sufferers and their advocates have for many years been subject to inaccurate ad hominem attacks on their motives for protesting the psychiatric paradigm. Inaccurate descriptions of legitimate critique as 'personal attack', or 'abuse', or terms actually associated with criminal 'harassment' are all too common, to the detriment of a patient community with valid concerns.

On September 26th, and 27th, 2007, a member of the Wikipedia online encyclopaedia posted a long attack on myself and others, which included the comments below, on their 'Admin Notice board', which were grossly misrepresentative of my work, and which made false, ad hominem attacks on my motives. Certain remarks in particular were highly libellous and defamatory. These remarks have now been present on the Wikipedia site for approximately 10 days.

I have already written to the founder of Wikipedia, Jim Wales, setting out the problem, and if I do not receive an apology and retraction I will take further action. My concern in writing to you today, however, involves Professor Wessely himself. The person posting these comments (someone whom the evidence suggests is named Guy Chapman, but which I have asked Mr Wales to verify and confirm), has claimed this:

"These individuals have also harassed Wessely in real life. That we can't include because it's not directly stated in the sources, but I have now exchanged emails with Wessely and it is the case. (Guy) 15:36, 27 September 2007 (UTC) "

I have made legitimate, academically informed critique of the work of Professor Wessely before in various public and political domains, as I have with regard to other persons active in this field, but I have certainly never harassed Professor Wessely in any way, particularly according to the British legal definition of 'harassment'. I have never emailed Professor Wessely, although he did once send an unsolicited email to me on 24th January 2004. I have never phoned him, or written to him, or done anything that should at all be construed as harassment. I have never made any 'personal attack' on him.

I strongly re-iterate, particularly, that critique of a person's claims in a field of study, or conduct in that field, does not itself constitute personal attack or harassment. Inaccurate claims that critiques, from members of the ME/CFS community and their advocates, of the 'psychiatric paradigm', or the actions of its proponents, somehow constitute 'personal attack' are a demoralising phenomenon. This is a key issue, and one on which I have undertaken further study.

But my specific worry here, is that it appears possible, from the comments of this person on the Wikipedia Admin Board, that Professor Wessely has written an email to this person, claiming that I have 'harassed' Professor Wessely 'in real life'. This claim, if indeed it has even been made, is patently false, and defamatory.

However, I accept the possibility that this claim may never have even been made, at least not in regard to myself. I therefore request from you confirmation of whether, or not, an email was sent to Guy Chapman, or other person, by Professor Wessely, claiming that I, specifically, have 'harassed' him, or that 'One Click', a group with which I was previously involved, have 'harassed' him. I also request access to any communications between Professor Wessely and this person around this issue.

If, and how, Mr Wales responds to my letter will determine what further action I may take in regard to Wikipedia's own part in this issue. My specific concern here is to establish whether, or not, Professor Wessely has made defamatory remarks against me. The result of my enquiries with yourself will determine what further action I may take, and I reserve the right to take further action as necessary, including possibly

legal action, and the publicising of my investigations.

I would be grateful if you would attend to this issue urgently, and look forward to your prompt response.

Yours faithfully [etc.]

2. Letter from Peter McGuffin to Angela Kennedy:

12 October 2007

Dear Ms Kennedy,

Thank you for your letter dated 1 October 2007 and received by e-mail in this office on 9 October 2007. The hard copy that you refer to in your email has not been received by this office.

Harassment is a serious issue and I welcome your acknowledgement of the distinction between an academic critique and a personal attack. I regret, however, that I am not able to comment on your conjectures about Wikipedia.

Yours sincerely [etc.]

3. Letter from Angela Kennedy to Peter McGuffin:

18th October 2007

Dear Professor McGuffin,

Thank you for your letter of 12th October.

I am writing firstly to let you know that my letter to you (which you have said was not received) was sent by special delivery. However, I do appreciate the problem may be related to the recent postal strikes as much as any potential internal delivery problems at KCL. If you wish, I can pursue the matter further with the Post Office.

My second point is regarding your response to my request for clarification. Contrary to what you have written in your response, I was not actually making conjectures about Wikipedia and asking for your comment. In my letter to you I asked specifically whether Professor Wessely has made any comments about myself allegedly 'harassing' him to a third party in the form of an email. Would you please confirm to me whether or not Professor Wessely is prepared to answer this very specific question, and whether the Department of Psychiatry are prepared to make this answer known to me?

I would be grateful if you would attend to this issue urgently, and look forward to your prompt response.

Yours faithfully [etc.]

4. Letter from Peter McGuffin to Angela Kennedy:

19 October 2007

Dear Ms Kennedy,

Thank you for your letter dated 18 October and received by email in this office on 18 October 2007.

The hard copy of your letter dated 1 October 2007, which was sent by special delivery, was received in the Institute of Psychiatry's post room on 16 October 2007 at 9.35 am and picked up by this office later that morning.

I reiterate that I am not able to comment on anything that may or may not be said in an online encyclopaedia.

Yours sincerely [etc.]

5. Letter from Angela Kennedy to Peter McGuffin:

22 November 2007

Dear Professor McGuffin,

Thank you for your latest letter of 19th October. I apologise for my delay in responding.

As you acknowledged in your letter of 12th October, Harassment is a serious issue. To make false claims of harassment against an academic is also a very serious issue, as no doubt you are aware.

If Professor Wessely had made claims that I have personally harassed him, they would be false, and therefore libellous. It should therefore be really very easy for Professor Wessely to confirm to you that he has *not* made such claims of harassment against myself, and for you to confirm to me the case. The fact that such a confirmation is not forthcoming causes me great concern.

I am therefore once more requesting that you confirm, as Professor Wessely's line manager, that Professor Wessely has not made any claim that I have personally harassed him, to a person named Guy Chapman, a known 'Wikipedia Administrator', or to anyone else.

If this cannot be confirmed, and there is good reason to believe that Professor Wessely has either claimed or implied that I have 'personally harassed him', then I shall expect an urgent apology by letter from your institution.

I reserve the right to pursue action as appropriate, to ensure my good name and reputation is not continued to be brought into disrepute. I would be grateful if you would attend to this issue urgently, and look forward to your prompt response.

Yours faithfully [etc.],

6. Letter from Angela Kennedy to John Williams:

17th January, 2008

Dear Mr Williams,

I am writing to you about a serious matter of defamation which potentially involves a member of KCL, Professor Simon Wessely. You have been copied in, by email, to my letters to Professor McGuffin on this issue, and therefore should be aware of the situation to a degree.

I am an advocate for my daughter, a young woman seriously ill and severely disabled by her illness, who was diagnosed with ME/CFS. I also politically advocate for the community at large. I am also a known critic of the 'psychiatric paradigm' of ME/CFS, of which I contend Professor Wessely is a proponent, and I undertake this critical engagement from an academic perspective (I appreciate the above term might be contested, but that is not the issue at hand).

I am currently working towards publication on this issue, having been engaged in academic research for some years. I have a social science background and am an Associate Lecturer with the Open University

(although the work I am undertaking in this field is not connected to this institution).

I therefore do have a reputation that might be damaged by libellous, defamatory comments.

On September 26th, and 27th, 2007, a member of the Wikipedia online encyclopaedia posted a long attack on myself and others, which included the comments below, on their 'Admin Notice board', which were grossly misrepresentative of my work, and which made false, ad hominem attacks on my motives. Certain remarks in particular were highly libellous and defamatory. The remarks stayed on the Wikipedia site for approximately 2 weeks before they were removed by Jim Wales, the founder of Wikipedia, after my continued insistence over that period.

The person posting these comments (someone whom the evidence suggests is named Guy Chapman, but which I have asked Mr Wales to verify and confirm), has claimed this:

"These individuals have also harassed Wessely in real life. That we can't include because it's not directly stated in the sources, but I have now exchanged emails with Wessely and it is the case. (Guy) 15:36, 27 September 2007 (UTC) "

I have made legitimate, academically informed critique of the work of Professor Wessely before in various public and political domains, as I have with regard to other persons active in this field, but I have certainly never harassed Professor Wessely in any way, particularly according to the British legal definition of 'harassment'. I have never emailed Professor Wessely, although he did once send an unsolicited email to me on 24th January 2004. I have never phoned him, or written to him, or done anything that should at all be construed as harassment. I have never made any 'personal attack' on him.

I strongly re-iterate, particularly, that critique of a person's claims in a field of study, or conduct in that field, does not itself constitute personal attack or harassment. Inaccurate claims that critiques, from members of the ME/CFS community and their advocates, of the 'psychiatric paradigm', or the actions of its proponents, somehow constitute 'personal attack' are a demoralising phenomenon. This is a key issue, and one on which I have undertaken further study.

But my specific concern, is that it appears possible, from the comments of this person on the Wikipedia Admin Board, that Professor Wessely has written an email to this person, claiming that I have 'harassed' Professor Wessely 'in real life'. This claim, if indeed it has even been made, would be patently false, and defamatory.

My first letter to Professor McGuffin set out these concerns, and also that I accepted the possibility that this claim may never have even been made, at least not in regard to myself, by Professor Wessely. I therefore requested from Professor McGuffin confirmation of whether, or not, an email was sent to Guy Chapman, or other person, by Professor Wessely, claiming that I, specifically, have 'harassed' him, or that 'One Click', a group with which I was previously involved, have 'harassed' him. I also requested access to any communications between Professor Wessely and this person around this issue.

Professor McGuffin has declined to 'comment' on the issue, despite the fact that I have written two more letters to him (copies of which I have emailed to you) to clarify my concerns and my requests.

As you will no doubt be aware, harassment is a serious issue. To make false claims of harassment against an academic is also a very serious issue, of which no doubt you are also aware.

If Professor Wessely had made claims that I have personally harassed him, they would be false, and therefore libellous. It should therefore be really very easy for Professor Wessely to confirm that he has **not** made such claims of harassment against myself, and for this to be confirmed to me. The fact that such a confirmation is not forthcoming causes me great concern.

In light of the lack of co-operation from Professor McGuffin, I am therefore requesting that you confirm, as Human Resources Manager for KCL, that Professor Wessely has not made any claim that I have personally harassed him, to a person named Guy Chapman, a known 'Wikipedia Administrator', or to anyone else.

If this cannot be confirmed, and there is good reason to believe that Professor Wessely has either claimed or implied that I have 'personally harassed him', then I shall expect an urgent apology by letter from your institution.

I reserve the right to pursue action as appropriate, to ensure my good name and reputation is not continued to be brought into disrepute. I would be grateful if you would investigate this issue urgently, and look forward to your prompt response.

Yours sincerely [etc.]

7. Letter from John Williams to Angela Kennedy:

24th January 2008

Dear Ms Kennedy,

Thank you for your letter dated 17th January 2008.

I have considered the contents carefully but I do believe that they repeat the points that you have made in earlier letters to the Dean of the School, Peter McGuffin.

Peter wrote to you on 12th and the 19th October and I am afraid that I can add nothing to his response.

Yours sincerely [etc.]

CORRESPONDENCE ENDS
