

A group of NHS whistleblowers have embarked on a series of landmark legal proceedings as part of a coordinated action to improve patient safety launched today.

Patients First, set-up by a group of doctors, nurse and managers who have suffered victimisation and financial loss as a result of blowing the whistle, have taken the first steps in legal action against two London hospital trusts. The trusts are accused of failing to have effective whistle blowing policies which ensure concerns are properly investigated and whistleblowers fairly treated.

Lawyers from Leigh Day, acting for Patients First, have also taken the highly unusual step of beginning proceedings against NHS London, the strategic health authority responsible for the trusts, and the Care Quality Commission, the NHS and social care regulator. Both are accused of failing to ensure the trusts complied with government whistle-blowing policies.

The group, which includes Dr Kim Holt who warned Great Ormond Street Hospital about the dangers before Baby Peter died in 2007 but was offered £120,000 to keep quiet, aims to reduce death and harm by lobbying the UK Government to ensure the NHS becomes open and accountable. It wants a ban on gagging clauses, greater transparency about how much the NHS spends on lawyers to silence whistleblowers and a parliamentary inquiry into their plight.