

# Short message from Michael Mansfield QC

Very sincere apologies for my absence tonight. When I realised it was going to be impossible I let Mark know the reason. It is medical and I hope you will forgive me if I do not go into detail in public.

This year has been remarkable already. The jury in the Hillsborough Inquests made historic findings about basic institutional failings, not just the police but others as well. It was the longest jury hearing in British legal history. Behind it lay the 27 year struggle of 96 families for truth and justice.

I mention this because there is presently a need to strive relentlessly for justice in the arena of mental health. The same determination and commitment is required to ensure certain objectives are achieved. The main one is parity of treatment. If you have a broken leg or a physical disease such ailments attract more resources and immediate understanding than the more amorphous nature of mental wellbeing. At a time of increasing and manifold pressures from economic adversity and austerity; insecurity posed by the threat of extreme religious bigotry ; global warming and the steady erosion of our environment ; the ever present fear of unemployment ; the detrimental effect of poor housing ; and the serious reduction in welfare benefits, education and health resources ; it can be no surprise that there are generations, particularly younger ones, who find that hope barely springs eternal !!

We must all be vigilant and aware of this crucible, in order to enable discussion and support. There should be no reluctance, no stigma for these matters to be openly addressed. It is a collective responsibility.

That also has been the fundamental objective of SOS ( Silence of Suicide ). This initiative was inaugurated by Yvette Greenway and myself last July following the suicide of my daughter Anna. It is now a nationwide network intended to encourage people to come together to openly discuss their fears, their feelings about suicide which for too long has carried criminal overtones such that feelings of guilt are experienced by all who are touched by this harrowing occurrence. We must ensure a release from mental imprisonment. People must feel free to speak.

Thank you and best wishes for your celebration.

*Michael*