

ROYAL COLLEGE OF VETERINARY SURGEONS

INQUIRY RE:

ANKE HILL MRCVS

DECISION OF THE DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE

Ms. Nicole Curtis appeared on behalf of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. Dr Hill did not appear and was not represented

1. Dr Hill faced the following charge:

That, being registered in the register of veterinary surgeons:

1. On 7 December 2020, at Mold Crown Court, you were convicted of conspiracy to kidnap, contrary to section 1(1) of the Criminal Law Act 1977;

In relation to which conviction, on 30 September 2021, at Caernarfon Crown Court, you were sentenced to an extended sentence, namely 19 years, 5 months imprisonment (comprising a custodial term of 14 years 5 months and an extended licence period of 5 years), made subject to a restraining order for an indefinite period and ordered to pay £190.00 by way of victim surcharge.

And that it is alleged that the above conviction renders you unfit to practice veterinary surgery.

Service of Notice of Hearing

2. The Committee was referred by Ms. Curtis to the Notice of Hearing dated 7 February 2022 and to an accompanying bundle of documents relating to service. The Committee was satisfied that the Notice containing the prescribed information was served upon Dr Hill at HMP [REDACTED] this being Dr Hill's last known address.

Proceeding in Absence

3. Ms. Curtis invited the Committee to proceed in the absence of Dr Hill. She referred the Committee to Dr Hill's Acknowledgment of Service dated 8 February 2022, in which Dr Hill confirmed that she would not be attending this Inquiry and wished to have her name voluntarily removed from the Register of Veterinary Surgeons. Ms. Curtis referred the Committee to details of the correspondence between the Royal College and Dr Hill, from which it was evident that Dr Hill did not wish to participate in the hearing.
4. Ms. Curtis referred the Committee to Rule 10.4 of the Veterinary Surgeons and Veterinary Practitioners (Disciplinary Committee) Procedure and Evidence Rules 2004 which provides that:

If the respondent does not appear, the Committee may decide to proceed in the respondent's absence, if it is satisfied that the notice of inquiry was properly served and that it is in the interests of justice to do so.

Ms. Curtis also referred the Committee to the principles set out, in particular, in *Adeogba v General Medical Council* [2016] EWCA Civ 162 and submitted that it was in the interests of justice to proceed as it was clear that Dr Hill knew of today's hearing and had decided not to participate.

5. The Committee accepted the advice of the legal adviser that the discretion to be exercised was a discretion to be exercised with care and caution and that *Adeogba* set out the relevant principles to be applied.

6. The Committee was satisfied that Dr Hill knew of today's hearing and had made a deliberate decision not to participate in this Inquiry. She had not sought an adjournment and the Committee concluded that her attendance on any future occasion was highly unlikely. It was in the interests of justice to proceed with the Inquiry today.

Background to the Charge

7. In her written submissions, Ms. Curtis referred the Committee to the Certificate of Conviction at the Mold Crown Court and to the sentencing remarks of Her Honour Judge Nicola Jones at Caernarfon Crown Court. In her sentencing remarks the Judge observed that she was sentencing Dr Hill for the leading part she had played in a carefully planned conspiracy to kidnap. This was the second such conspiracy in which Dr Hill played a leading role and was pursued while she was on bail in respect of an earlier conspiracy. This conspiracy involved the abduction of a child at knifepoint and the involvement of a number of other individuals in an attempt to secure an unhindered passage out of the country.
8. Due to the prompt action of the police, Dr Hill was arrested some four hours after the abduction and while still in the UK. The victim of the kidnap was released at the same time.
9. In sentencing her, the Judge observed that the conspiracy had been planned over several months and had involved meticulous and sophisticated preparations designed to avoid detection. These preparations included the use of encrypted messaging applications, codenames, prepaid mobile phones which were to be discarded after use, more than one vehicle, false number plates, false documentation and disguises.
10. The kidnapping itself was violent, involving the use of a knife which was held to the throat of a foster carer, and the forcible abduction of the victim. The foster carer's child and baby were at the scene and witnessed this event.

11. The judge considered that Dr Hill, with one other individual, was the leader of the conspiracy. She had involved a number of others in her plan. The abduction caused, in the Judge's words, "unspeakable misery and considerable harm" to the victim of the kidnap and those involved in caring for the victim. The Judge also concluded that Dr Hill presented a significant risk of causing serious harm by committing further specified offences.
12. The Judge therefore imposed a very substantial custodial sentence, together with an extended sentence in order to protect the public and, in particular, the principal victim of the conspiracy.

The conviction and fitness to practise veterinary surgery

13. The Committee had regard to the Certificate of Conviction which was conclusive evidence of the fact of conviction. The Committee noted that the conviction was entered upon Dr Hill's plea of Guilty.
14. The Committee also had regard to the sentencing remarks of the Judge. A very substantial custodial sentence had been imposed, together with an extended sentence. The Committee noted the observations made by the Judge not only with regard to the circumstances of the offence but also with regard to future risk.
15. The Committee had regard to the Disciplinary Committee's Guidance which states:

"A conviction may be related to professional or personal behaviour and whether it renders a veterinary surgeon unfit to practice is a matter of judgment for the Disciplinary Committee. Behaviour unconnected with the practice of veterinary surgery can cause concerns about the protection of animals or the wider public interest"
16. The Committee recognized that the wider public interest includes upholding the reputation of the veterinary profession and maintaining public confidence in the profession.

17. Dr Hill's conviction was clearly such as to bring the profession into disrepute and undermine public confidence in the profession. The Committee therefore concluded that the fact of the conviction rendered Dr Hill unfit to practise veterinary surgery.

Sanction

18. The Committee had regard to the Sanctions Guidance. It recognized that its role was to apply a proportionate sanction to the case before it.
19. The Committee took into account a number of aggravating features. In particular, the conviction arose as a result of careful planning over several months and involved the use of violence. Its principal victim was vulnerable by reason of age.
20. The Committee was unable to identify any mitigating feature, save the fact that Dr Hill had no previous regulatory history.
21. The Committee also took into account the principle, established in *The Council for the Regulation of Health Care Professionals v General Dental Council (Fleischmann)* [2005] EWHC 87 (Admin), that a practitioner convicted of a serious criminal offence should not be permitted to resume practice until she has satisfactorily completed her sentence. Dr Hill's sentence will not expire for many years and the restraining order is in place indefinitely.
22. The Committee considered sanction in ascending order.
23. This was much too serious a case for no further action to be taken.
24. The Committee saw no useful purpose in postponing judgement.
25. The case was also much too serious to be disposed of by means of reprimand or warning.
26. The Committee did not consider that a period of suspension would be sufficient to meet the public interest. Further, the Committee noted, having regard to the case of

Fleischmann, that Dr Hill's sentence had many years to run and that the restraining order to which she was subject was indefinite.

27. The Committee concluded that the only appropriate and proportionate sanction in this case was that of Dr Hill's removal from the register of veterinary surgeons maintained by RCVS. The Committee noted that this was a case involving serious harm to members of the public; it involved an offence the commission of which included violence; and a reasonable and fully informed member of the public would consider that it also evidenced a harmful deep-seated personality or attitude problem. All of these factors indicated that the behaviour which resulted in Dr Hill's conviction was fundamentally incompatible with being a veterinary surgeon and that removal from the register was necessary to uphold proper standards of conduct and to maintain public confidence in the profession.
28. Accordingly, the Committee directs that Dr Hill's name is removed from the register of veterinary surgeons.

Disciplinary Committee
7 March 2022