### PRESS RELEASE: Starvation death of man with Down syndrome was euthanasia by default – Down’s Syndrome Research Foundation urgently warns about discriminatory end-of-life treatment

**For Immediate Release**

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**The** [**appalling case**](https://www.itv.com/news/2025-10-01/i-dont-want-to-die-downs-syndrome-man-starved-to-death-in-hospital) **of Adrian Poulton (56), who died in Poole Hospital after receiving no food for nine days, tragically exposes the vulnerability of people with intellectual disabilities in end-of-life decision-making across the NHS. The Down’s Syndrome Research Foundation (DSRF UK) offers deep condolences to Adrian’s family regarding his wrongful death, and resolves to fight for equity and adequate safeguards to protect the rights of people with Down syndrome, particularly the fundamental right to life. It is clearer than ever that Kim Leadbeater’s proposed Assisted Dying Bill tramples on these sensitive issues, without due regard to specific vulnerabilities and current failures in end-of-life care.**

Regarding the ITV investigation which broke the news yesterday, [Prof. Irene Tuffrey-Wijne](https://www.kingston.ac.uk/about/staff/professor-irene-tuffrey-wijne), Professor of Intellectual Disability & Palliative Care at Kingston University, states: *“It is deeply shocking that after so many years of reports and inquiries into avoidable deaths of people with learning disabilities, these horrific avoidable deaths still happen. This terrible story should be headline news. Compulsory staff training on how to support people with learning disabilities should be a priority for hospital trusts everywhere, but they also need to look at their systems for communicating between staff and services involved in the care of people with learning disabilities.”*

Kingston University Research Assistant [Richard Keagan-Bull](https://www.kingston.ac.uk/about/staff/richard-keagan-bull), who has a learning disability, responded to the news of Mr Poulton’s death: *“It’s absolutely disgraceful, horrible and upsetting. He came in for a broken hip and then he didn’t get any food. It doesn’t matter how old or young you are or whether you have disabilities, you should be treated with respect and given all the right care. We keep hearing those stories. When will they stop?”*

**Emerging Evidence of End-of-Life Vulnerabilities**

The most recent [LeDeR](https://leder.nhs.uk/images/aflreport2324/AFL%20report%202023-24.pdf) report (Learning from lives and deaths - people with a learning disability and autistic people) shockingly recounts that people with learning disabilities in the UK continue to die decades earlier than the general population.

The 2023-2024 LeDeR report was only released a month ago on 2nd September 2025, after a delay of more than a year. This holdup contributes to a lack of transparency and absence of updated data on mortality rates among people with intellectual disabilities. It has also taken four years for the current story on Mr Adrian Poulton to break. The full extent of existing problems of discrimination, neglect, communication issues, and vulnerability to coercion affecting people with intellectual disabilities, including those with Down syndrome, is likely to be more widespread than we know.

In light of these issues, DSRF UK Chair Dr Elizabeth Corcoran states: *“We denounce the fact that the Assisted Dying Bill does not explicitly protect the rights of people with intellectual disabilities, as we consider that this will push heavily in an extremely dangerous direction. There are simply too many cracks in the UK’s healthcare system for further pressure to be added. Rejecting the Bill is the best course of action to explicitly protect people with Down syndrome from euthanasia. We call on Peers in the House of Lords to firmly reject the Assisted Dying Bill. Such damning emerging evidence on prematurely occurring deaths of people like Adrian Poulton who have intellectual disabilities is a scandal that we cannot allow to continue unchecked.”*

For media interviews and further information, contact: [dsrf@dsrf-uk.org](https://www.dsrf-uk.org/dsrf%40dsrf-uk.org)

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