



# The Society for the Study of Social Problems

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September 8, 2014

Ms. Sara Ryan  
3 Wharton Road  
Headington, Oxford OX3 8AH  
United Kingdom

Dear Ms. Ryan,

On behalf of the Society for the Study of Social Problems (SSSP), may I offer our most sincere condolences on the loss of your son, Connor Sparrowhawk. Our thoughts are with you and your family and friends.

I am writing as well to provide you with the attached resolution regarding Connor's death, which was passed unanimously at the 2014 Annual Meeting of the SSSP in San Francisco this past August. The results of the independent report about Connor's preventable death were discussed and this, in turn, prompted the resolution and recognition of the need for broader social changes that challenge the warehousing of disabled people and more appropriate responses regarding the death of inpatients.

The SSSP's purpose is to promote and protect sociological research and teaching on significant problems of social life and, particularly, to encourage the work of young sociologists; to stimulate the application of scientific method and theory to the study of vital social problems; to encourage problem-centered social research; to foster cooperative relations among persons and organizations engaged in the application of scientific sociological findings to the formulation of social policies; to foster higher quality of life, social welfare, and positive social relations in society and the global community and to undertake any activity related thereto or necessary or desirable for the accomplishment of the foregoing purposes. Your son's death reaffirms the importance of this kind of work, and reminds all of us that tragedies like this are not simply numbers, but real human beings with family and friends who cared for the victims deeply. As societies we are diminished if a tragedy like this does not spur us to do better. A session will be dedicated to a discussion of Connor's death at next year's conference - the 65th Annual Meeting, which will be held from August 21-23, 2015 at the Radisson Blu Aqua Hotel, Chicago, Illinois.

Please feel free to publicize this resolution widely, including with policy makers, and please ensure that it is shared with the #JusticeforLB campaign. Again, our condolences and please let us know if we can be helpful in efforts to address this pressing social problem.

Sincerely,

Héctor L. Delgado, Ph.D.  
Executive Officer

**2014 APPROVED RESOLUTION  
THE SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL PROBLEMS**

**Resolution 1: Motion Regarding the Death of Connor Sparrowhawk While in Institutional Care Submitted by Mark Sherry, University of Toledo.**

Whereas Connor Sparrowhawk was an 18 year old English disabled man who drowned in the bath at Slade House in Oxfordshire, England, a National Health Service Assessment and Treatment unit on July 4th 2013;

Whereas he was having many seizures around that time, but was left in the bathtub alone and died;

Whereas Connor's death was initially, incorrectly, presented to the family as death by "natural causes";

Whereas an independent report<sup>1</sup> about his death came to the following conclusions:

1. That Connor's death was preventable.
2. That there were significant failings in his care and treatment.
3. That the failure of staff to respond to and appropriately risk assess Connor's epilepsy led to a series of poor decisions around his care.
4. That the level of observations in place at bath time was unsafe and failed to safeguard Connor.
5. That if a safe observation process had been put in place and Connor had been appropriately supervised in the bath, he would not have died on 4 July 2013.
6. That the STATT (Short Term Assessment and Treatment Team) unit lacked effective clinical leadership.
7. That there had been no comprehensive care plan in place for the management of Connor's epilepsy and his epilepsy was not considered as part of Connor's risk assessment, in breach of NICE epilepsy guidance.

Whereas Connor's preventable death was a tragedy which has gained the attention of the disability community internationally, because disabled people are so often given inadequate and even life-threatening care.

Be it resolved that we express our sorrow and rage at the preventable death of Connor Sparrowhawk;

Be it resolved that we express our solidarity with his family, and with others internationally who are pushing for accountability in this case;

Be it resolved that we demand changes in the disability system more broadly, so that others are not subject to inadequate care and preventable death;

Be it resolved that we recommit ourselves to ensuring that all disabled people live in safety, with dignity and respect.

Be it resolved that SSSP send a letter about this issue to the *#Justice For LB Campaign*<sup>2</sup> and to Connor's mother Sara Ryan, supporting the introduction of a Private Members' Bill in the British Parliament, (which advocates have informally called "the LB Bill"), that will put the choices of disabled people and their families at the heart of the decision-making process. The letter should also indicate SSSP's approval of wide distribution of the letter to policy makers, and among the disability community.

Be it resolved that the SSSP letter support the *#Justice For LB Campaign* as they seek the policy changes in the following structural areas:

- Policies that lead to the warehousing of disabled people
- Institutions which don't provide appropriate care,

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<sup>1</sup> See this link for discussion of report and as reference for points 1-7 below: <http://www.southernhealth.nhs.uk/news/report-into-death-sparrowhawk/>.

<sup>2</sup> They can be contacted at <http://107daysofaction.wordpress.com>.

- Inadequate management of seizures in many health and disability institutions,
- The need for different responses regarding the death of inpatients,
- The need to overturn policies that make the family of the deceased pay for their own legal expenses when investigations and inquests occur into preventable deaths,
- The need to meaningfully involve the family in the inquest process for the purpose of transparency,
- The need for improved professional accountability, such as referral of staff to their relevant regulatory bodies where preventable deaths have occurred,
- The need for national mortality review systems for deaths in institutional care,
- The need for investigations and consequences in circumstances where a preventable death is wrongly presented to the family as death by “natural causes”.

Be it further resolved that SSSP add a special session at our next conference in honor of Connor Sparrowhawk. The session will ensure that the issue continues to be discussed, with scholars examining the social problem further.