

Subject: Open Letter – End the Use of the Fabricated or Induced Illness (FII) Label

To:

Secretary of State for Education

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care

Chief Executive, NHS England

Chief Executive, General Medical Council

President, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

President, Royal College of Psychiatrists

Chief Social Worker for Children and Families

Chair, Association of Directors of Children's Services Safeguarding Group

Chair, NICE Guidelines Development Group

Chair, Family Justice Council

President of the Family Division, Sir Andrew McFarlane

Open Letter: Urgent Call to Withdraw the FII Label

Recent coverage in *The Sunday Times* has exposed the devastating consequences of misidentifying parents - mostly mothers - as fabricating or inducing illness in their children. It told the stories of Ella, who was separated from her mother for eight months and placed with untrained carers who failed to meet her complex needs, and Melody, whose mother watched her die in pain after medication was withdrawn during an FII investigation. We know of many more such cases. These are not abstract tragedies—they are direct, preventable outcomes of acting on flawed guidance.

FII is not a medical diagnosis. It has no agreed criteria, no reliable method of identification, and no robust evidence base. Yet guidance intended to protect is instead causing harm—particularly to disabled and neurodivergent children with complex needs. Parents are increasingly suspected of fabrication not because of evidence, but because they persist in seeking answers, disagree with professionals, or challenge misdiagnoses. Advocacy is being pathologised.

We acknowledge that in a very small number of cases, illness may be fabricated or induced by a parent or carer. These are extremely rare and should be treated as either criminal

matters or mental health concerns, using established safeguarding, forensic, or psychiatric pathways. They do not require a vague and misapplied label like FII.

A review of Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews in England (2010–2021) identified only four cases of serious harm due to confirmed fabrication or illness induction—none involving a child’s death. In contrast, hundreds of families report lasting trauma following false FII accusations: delayed treatment, forced separation, exclusion from services, and fear of seeking help again—even in emergencies.

This is not safeguarding. It is systemic harm.

We call for:

- Immediate withdrawal of the FII label and associated guidance
- Creation of new, evidence-based frameworks co-produced with disabled people and parent carers
- Professional training that promotes collaborative, family-centred practice, and understanding of disability and distress
- A review by regulatory bodies—including the GMC, Royal Colleges, and NICE—of any guidance legitimising the use of FII
- Judicial caution in accepting FII allegations without rigorous factual analysis and greater scrutiny of expert witness testimony

We enclose a briefing article, soon to be published in *Family Law*, outlining the evidence and urgent case for reform. We urge all recipients to reflect on the profound and preventable harm being done—and to act before more children and families are damaged.

Yours sincerely,

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