

# March 18, 2008

## Coroners rampant

### SSRI's suicide link-again,

Two Coroners strike blows for the truth. One has been hammered by a Minister out to silence him.

South Cumbria coroner Ian Smith will contact drug authorities because he fears people are killing themselves after taking antidepressants

Mr Nigel Woodburn drove into a tree just four days after being prescribed antidepressants. He was killed at the wheel of his car on June 16, minutes after confessing to his wife he'd had suicidal thoughts. He had been prescribed Citalopram after becoming depressed through ill health. His heart-broken family said they were not aware of the suicide risks associated with antidepressants until the issue was highlighted at Mr Woodburn's inquest this week.

Mr Smith told Tuesday's inquest he knew of several other suspected suicides involving the same group of antidepressants, known as selective serotonin re-uptake inhibitors (SSRIs).

**He said: "I have to say this is probably the fifth, if not sixth inquest I've heard within a period of three years when somebody either just going on to Citalopram or Seroxat, or coming off it, have killed themselves one way or another, totally out of the blue, totally without expectation, without a history of suicidal thoughts in the past."**

Mr Smith said "I think what happened to Mr Woodburn was in part as a result of the drugs he was taking. There has been publicity about these drugs recently, particularly relating to younger adults, and it does seem to me it's something that needs to be highlighted."

The Wiltshire coroner has stirred the wrath of defence secretary, Des Browne. He has gone to the high court in an attempt to prevent coroners criticizing the Ministry of Defence during military inquests.

Government lawyers yesterday presented papers to the Royal Courts of Justice asking for a court order banning coroners from accusing the MoD of "serious failings" when recording verdicts on service personnel deaths.

The defence secretary claimed the phrase was tantamount to blaming the government for the deaths of servicemen and might be used against the MoD by families seeking to sue for compensation. Des, what are you doing? Who sent the soldiers into a mission impossible in Helmand? Who said he hoped that the Helmand Mission would 'be over in three years without a shot being

fired.' It was the Government who cannot be exonerated for the blame for their deaths.

Relatives of servicemen and women killed in Iraq and Afghanistan condemned the government for hampering inquests but David Masters, the Wiltshire coroner, said he and his colleagues would not be "deflected from conducting full, frank and fearless inquiries into deaths they are entrusted to investigate – those of people serving their country when they are killed abroad".

"If something needs to be said, I'll say it," he added. While parliament is still reluctant to face the truth on the 89 deaths from SSRI in Afghanistan, coroners are doing our work.

**Imposing a gag on them would be an outrage.**