

## 'I WARNED MINISTERS ABOUT BABY DEATH EXPERT THREE YEARS AGO'

By Rob McNeil and Joe Murphy

A former Government adviser today bitterly accused ministers of 'ignoring' her warnings about the scandal of children being wrongly taken from their families.

Childcare expert Jan Loxley told the Evening Standard she wrote to senior politicians including Children's Minister Margaret Hodge three years ago to warn of growing disquiet about the theories of paediatrician Sir Roy Meadow.

She claimed ministers failed to take action - with the result that more families were broken up on the basis of Professor Meadow's theory that some mothers are likely to harm their children to draw attention to themselves as a result of a condition called Munchausen's Syndrome by Proxy.

Mrs Loxley, an expert on truancy and 'latch-key' kids who advised ministers in the Seventies, began campaigning after her own two children were almost taken into care by social workers following Professor Meadow's guidelines.

'Not only has the Government refused to take notice of our advice about this, but they have taken a quantum leap toward enshrining Meadow's flawed and dangerous theories as absolute fact,' said Mrs Loxley.

Professor Meadow's theories were discredited in a series of court appeals by mothers wrongly convicted of killing their babies. An estimated 5,000 children were wrongly taken into care before his work was called into question.

'So many people have suffered because of this,' said Mrs Loxley. 'It is an outrage that nobody acted sooner, despite the piles of evidence from respected psychologists that the syndrome had no 'robust scientific and statistical base'.'

Mrs Loxley, who lives with her family in Finchley, said: 'For the families where children have been taken away the damage is irreparable, but even for families like mine, where we have successfully challenged the diagnosis, there is a huge social stigma that lingers.'

'Despite the Government's attempts to come over as sympathetic they have still not removed the guidelines about Munchausen's from their website and are not taking proper action to stop matters getting worse.'

Former teacher Mrs Loxley, 53, wrote to 40 politicians in 2000 warning of the concerns. She claimed Mrs Hodge ignored her letter, while Harriet Harman - whom she had known personally from her Whitehall days - had taken three years to respond. She launched a campaign group called Parents, Professionals and Politicians Protecting Children With Illness And/Or

Disability which is pushing for changes in the way that social workers are able to diagnose abuse.

Her fight began after Barnet council placed her own two children, 14-year-old David and nine-year-old Helen, on its 'at risk' register in 1998.

She said: 'David suffers from Asperger's Syndrome - a form of autism - and chronic fatigue syndrome, otherwise known as ME. As a result of the symptoms of these conditions, which had not been diagnosed at that time, social workers used Professor Meadow's guidelines to imply David may have been being abused at home.

I fought against social services and managed to get my children taken off the list, but I realised that, if I could be targeted by social services because of this unquestioning belief in Meadow's ideas, then there must be lots of people who are less well equipped to deal with these sort of accusations.

'The letter I wrote to ministers in 2000 made it quite clear that a complete review of the diagnoses of Munchausen needed to be undertaken, but instead of that the Government enshrined the condition further into policy by using a group of people, all of whom were believers in Meadow's ideas, to review the guidelines for where the condition can be diagnosed.'