A particular relationship

Since Professor Linda Bryder published her controversial book *A History of the ‘Unfortunate Experiment’ at National Women’s Hospital* attacks on her have been persistent and personal. Whatever one’s views, this approach has done little to enhance the discourse and has detracted significantly from the tenor of the debate.

She has been accused by the University of Otago vice-chancellor Professor David Skegg of either misunderstanding the science or of deliberate obfuscation (*NZ Herald*, September 2009). One might accept that this is all part of vigorous academic intercourse, but for his close colleague Professor Charlotte Paul to imply (without a whit of solid, specific evidence) in *The Cartwright Papers* that Professor Bryder had developed a “particular relationship” with two senior gynaecologists, such that they may have influenced her in some presumably clandestine way, is entirely different. If in fact this term has some other more obscure interpretation, then perhaps she could enlighten us as to what this is. This of course elevates the debate to another level and clearly implies that Professor Bryder is not only stupid and or a liar, but incapable of independent study.

Whatever their opinions in this debate, the manner in which these two outstanding clinicians (Professor Colin Mantell and Dr Tony Baird) have been portrayed is, in my view, unfortunate. To use such a ploy as a vehicle to attack Professor Bryder is not what one would expect from the leaders of an academic department but reminds one of a chapter from *The Famous Five*. For a vice-chancellor (irrespective of his or her own views) to be associated with or supportive of such an approach would, I think, be unprecedented and I hope would be seen by his peers, at the very least, inappropriate.

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