



Department
of Health

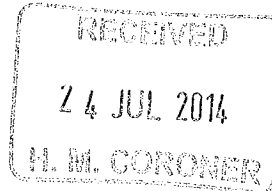
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From Dr Dan Poulter MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health

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Mr André Rebello OBE
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21 JUL 2014

Dear Mr Rebello,

Thank you for your letter to Jeremy Hunt about the death of Mrs Samarajit Singh. I am responding on his behalf. Your report advised that Mrs Singh committed suicide while suffering post natal depression, some 12 weeks after the birth of her son. You raised two matters of concern in this case;

1. There are no specialist community perinatal health services in the Wirral and the treatment available was inadequate
2. There is no mother and baby perinatal mental health inpatient unit in the Liverpool City region.

Specialised Perinatal Mental Health Services (Mother and Baby Units) are a part of a wider network of services that provide care for this patient group and the commissioning of the 'specialist' (local) and 'specialised' (national) pathway is a responsibility shared between NHS England, Clinical Commissioning Groups and Local Authorities.

As local Perinatal Mental Health Services are commissioned by Clinical Commissioning Groups, we are unable to provide a response to the first of your concerns but I note you have sent a copy of your report to the commissioners in the Wirral who should be able to address this point.

NHS England has had responsibility for commissioning the 'Specialised' element of this pathway (Mother and Baby in-patient Units) since April 2013. A specification for these specialised perinatal services was developed by the NHS England specialised perinatal Clinical Reference Group, which comprises representatives from across the country with both clinical members and patients/Carers. The specification was subject to national consultation and NHS England work with the Royal College to develop quality standards.

'Specialised' services are those services where the incidence of patients needing treatment is low and where the specialised qualifications, skills and experience required to treat the condition are scarce and in high demand. These services are often categorised as high cost and low volume.

Mother and Baby Units fall under this category of service and are therefore commissioned on a regional, rather than local, basis. This ensures that those very specialised qualifications, clinical skills and experience required to treat the patient group can be maintained and that the service can be commissioned cost-effectively, making best use of public funds. If there were to be a Mother and Baby unit in every major city, the use of the service by that city's population would be minimal and clinicians would quickly lose their specialist knowledge and skills because of infrequent use. It would also be inefficient because of the low demand.

The relevant Regional Unit for this particular speciality is based in Manchester but is open to, and used by, the whole population of the North West. The Unit has 10 beds which is sufficient to satisfy the needs of the North West's population, cost effectiveness and most importantly ensures clinically qualified, skilled and experienced interventions.

Additionally, it should be noted that the commissioning arrangements through NHS England ensure that, should a particular Regional Unit have no vacant beds at the time of need, or a patient does not wish to attend that particular Regional Unit, a bed in a neighbouring Regional Unit may be utilised.

However, I have noted your concerns and agree there is a need for strong linkage between the physical and mental health aspects of care in line with the government's parity of esteem initiative - the principle by which mental health must be given equal priority to physical health.

To this end, I have copied this correspondence to Jane Cummings who is Chief Nursing Officer for England to draw her attention to this important issue and so that she can consider how awareness can be raised with CCGs through their current work programme.

I hope that this response is helpful and I thank you for bringing the circumstances of Mrs Singh's death to our attention.

Best wishes,



DR DAN POULTER