

Friday, 11 June 2021

Sent by email to: 

Dear Assistant Coroner P Barlow

Re: Ella Adoo Kissi- Debrah
Regulation 28 – Action to Prevent Future Deaths

We have read carefully your report regarding the tragic and untimely death of Ella Adoo Kissi-Debrah and have discussed this with senior colleagues within the RCPCH.

The RCPCH supports, educates and develops paediatricians, and the wider child health workforce and services, to deliver high quality safe care for infants, children and young people. You have asked us to respond to your concern that the adverse effects of air pollution on health are not being sufficiently communicated to patients and their carers by medical professionals. Through our political advocacy work on child health, we believe we can also contribute to some of your concerns around actions that need to be considered by local and national government.

In line with the GMC standards,¹ all medical curricula have moved away from being prescriptive in relation to disease and conditions, to focus on capabilities and learning outcomes. The RCPCH curriculum includes a domain on health promotion, requiring all paediatricians to demonstrate capabilities around understanding the environment, economic and cultural contexts of health and healthcare illness on illness prevention.² Paediatricians who subspecialise in paediatric respiratory medicine will cover these capabilities in greater depth.

At a national level, the College is working with the children's team at NHS England/Improvement and Health Education England to develop asthma competencies for child health professionals and carers. The College's own educational course on improving asthma care considers the wider determinants of outcomes in asthma for children.

Our joint report with the Royal College of Physicians in 2016, *Every breath we take: the lifelong impact of air pollution* brought forward the commitment from health professionals to explore the available evidence and develop recommendations on the role air pollution plays to adverse health outcomes, clearly exposing instances of avoidable illness', disability, and death.³

¹ <https://www.gmc-uk.org/education/standards-guidance-and-curricula/standards-and-outcomes/excellence-by-design>

² <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/education-careers/training/progress/curriculum#domain-5---health-promotion-and-illness-prevention-gpc-4>

³ <https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/projects/outputs/every-breath-we-take-lifelong-impact-air-pollution>

The College's *State of Child Health* report reveals the UK as having one of the highest rates of asthma deaths among 10 to 24-year-olds in Europe.⁴ ⁵ Emergency admissions, and deaths, relating to asthma are largely preventable with improved management and early intervention, and sadly these poor outcomes are strongly associated with deprivation. In January 2020, we published two major pieces of research and policy advocacy to highlight the threat of air quality to health outcomes for children, which I will go on to describe.

Our position statement on outdoor air quality in the UK, strongly supports national policies, practices and legislations that aim to improve outdoor air quality and advocates for sharing information and supporting the public to act.⁶ We recognise that everyone has a responsibility for reducing air pollution and have urged paediatricians to be aware of our position on outdoor air quality, and use it to inform patients and their families of the health impacts and encourage and support them to make positive changes to improve air quality and reduce their exposure to air pollution. We also ask that paediatricians act as role models for others and make personal changes to reduce air pollution where possible, and that they encourage change within their workplace and the wider NHS. Finally, we ask that paediatricians are made aware of local and national initiatives to improve air quality and signpost families to relevant resources.

The College's research study *The inside story: Health effects of indoor air quality on children and young people* was clear that the responsibility for clean air cannot solely rest with individuals and urged government and local authorities to develop a national strategy and set indoor air quality standards.⁷ It specifically asks that more assistance is provided for people in rented and social housing to report air quality problems, recognising that social deprivation plays a major role in driving poor health outcomes.

We are committed to leading the way to adopt ways of working and policies that support improvements in outdoor air quality. In October 2020 we joined many other organisations in declaring a climate emergency, highlighting the detrimental impacts of air pollution on younger people.⁸ Climate change has been identified as a priority in our new College strategy for 2021-24, and we are in the process of establishing a comprehensive programme of work which will be driven by our members. Our ambitious aims include:

- effectively using our collective voice and expertise as paediatricians to influence the national and international climate change agenda, focusing in particular on the health impacts faced by children and young people now and in the future
- advancing research on the effects of climate change on child health inequalities and on the impacts of the climate crisis on young people's physical and mental health
- developing and promoting training for our members on key aspects of sustainable healthcare and the climate crisis, including communication about this topic with patients and families

⁴ <https://stateofchildhealth.rcpch.ac.uk/evidence/long-term-conditions/asthma/#page-section-4>

⁵ https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2018-10/child_health_in_2030_in_england_-_report_2018-10.pdf

⁶ <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/outdoor-air-quality-uk-position-statement#key-messages-for-health-professionals>

⁷ <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/inside-story-health-effects-indoor-air-quality-children-young-people#what-did-we-find>

⁸ <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news-events/news/uk-paediatricians-declare-climate-emergency>

- supporting our members to advocate for improved sustainability locally in their clinical work and workplaces as well as supporting the wider national ambition for the NHS to be net zero by 2040

Please see our priorities for action for more information.⁹

The RCPCH is a member of the UK Health Alliance on Climate Change¹⁰ and continues to work in partnership with others to advocate for responses to climate change that protects and promotes public health. In June we will be marking Clean Air Day with our members and showing our support for this year's theme '*let's protect our children's health from air pollution*'.

We welcome the NHS Long Term Plan's commitment to renew its NHS prevention programme and recognise the opportunities brought forward by the upcoming Health and Social Care Bill where integrated care systems (ICS) will provide the basis for health organisations and local authorities to improve upstream prevention of avoidable illness. It is critically important that children are represented at strategic level in ICSs so they reap the benefits of evidence-based planning with sufficient resource to meet their needs. We will be supporting this year's #AskAboutAsthma campaign as the NHS in London ask sufferers to '*take three small steps to improve lives.*' This includes a reminder to have an annual asthma review, ensure inhaler techniques are right and make sure an asthma plan is in place and well understood.

Thank you for raising this case with us and reminding us of the importance of this work.

Yours sincerely



Dr [REDACTED]
President, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health

⁹ <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/tackling-climate-change>

¹⁰ <http://www.ukhealthalliance.org/>