

**Ms Penelope Schofield**

Coroner's Court  
Woodvale  
Lewes Road  
Brighton  
BN2 3QB

**National Medical Director**

NHS England  
Wellington House  
133-155 Waterloo Road  
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SE1 8UG

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26 July 2023

Dear Ms Schofield,

**Re: Regulation 28 Report to Prevent Future Deaths – Mr Nicholas John Pennicott who died on 19 August 2021.**

Thank you for your Report to Prevent Future Deaths (hereafter "Report") dated 11 May concerning the death of Nicholas John Pennicott on 19 August 2021. In advance of responding to the specific concerns raised in your Report, I would like to express my deep condolences to Nicholas' family and loved ones. NHS England are keen to assure the family and the coroner that the concerns raised about Nicholas' care have been listened to and reflected upon.

I am grateful for the further time granted to respond to your Report, and I apologise for any anguish this delay may have caused to Nicholas' family or friends. I realise that responses to Coroner Reports can form part of the important process of family and friends coming to terms with what has happened to their loved ones and appreciate this will have been an incredibly difficult time for them.

In your Report, you raise a concern regarding the hospital waiting times for a Neurology outpatient appointment at the University Hospitals Sussex NHS Foundation Trust (UHSUSSEX) due to capacity issues. I have been sighted on their response to your Report and note that since July 2022, they are operating under a new clinical operating model which has improved neurology capacity at UHSUSSEX.

This includes consultant-led triaging of referred patients, providing advice and guidance to GPs and other hospital consultants, and reduction in administrative time taken to register referrals. I note that the Trust aims to see urgent referrals within 4 weeks and has committed to making further improvements across its neurology service.

Regarding staffing challenges within the neurology workforce at UHSUSSEX, I note from their response to you that they are in the process of recruiting to additional consultant posts. I am advised that there are currently two consultant vacancies, but that one locum is in place and that UHSUSSEX has also engaged Elective Services to provide additional outpatient capacity in the interim period while recruitment is ongoing.

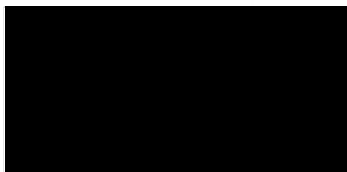
Your Report also raises a concern that there is a shortage of neurologists at a national level. This is a well-recognised issue within the NHS and there is currently significant variation in neurologist numbers across England. [The Getting It Right First Time \(GIRFT\) programme](#) for neurology (GIRFT is national NHS England programme designed to improve the treatment and care of patients through clinically led reviews) recommends that all acute hospitals have acute neurology liaison services in place, and, ideally, acute neurology outpatient clinics to urgently see rapidly deteriorating patients. However, this is dependent on workforce constraints.

Last month, NHS England published the [NHS Long Term Workforce Plan](#), setting out our plans to grow, retain and reform our workforce across the next fifteen years. This plan looks to reduce the national shortages we see across the NHS, helping to provide safe and timely access to urgent care that will reduce the delays currently being faced by patients such as Nicholas.

I would also like to provide further assurances on national NHSE work taking place around the Reports to Prevent Future Deaths. All reports received are discussed by the Regulation 28 Working Group, comprising Regional Medical Directors, and other clinical and quality colleagues from across the regions. This ensures that key learnings and insights around preventable deaths are shared across the NHS at both a national and regional level and helps us pay close attention to any emerging trends that may require further review and action.

Thank you for bringing these important patient safety issues to my attention and please do not hesitate to contact me should you need any further information.

Yours sincerely,

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National Medical Director