

15 December 2023

Miss Susan Evans
Assistant Coroner
South Yorkshire (West)


gmc-uk.org

Dear Miss Evans

Regulation 28: Report to Prevent Future Deaths (ref: 1413738)

I am very sorry to hear of the tragic circumstances Tracy Gambrell's death. I extend my sincere condolences to Tracy's family and to others affected.

You raise the concern in your report that it is not current and expected practice for surgeons to measure the incision from the insula to the temporal horn at appropriate times during a transsylvian amygdalohippocampectomy. We do not provide guidance on clinical procedures, and other organisations who hold the expert clinical knowledge will be better placed to address your concern more directly, but I will explain where our standards and guidance will support actions taken to address your concern.

Our role in setting professional standards for doctors

We set the knowledge, skills, values and behaviours expected of all doctors working in the UK, and support them to understand and meet these [professional standards](#). Our guidance is high level because it applies to all doctors, and at every stage of their careers and in every specialty. We expect doctors to use their professional judgment and apply the principles in our guidance to their specific circumstances. Through a process called revalidation, linked to annual appraisals, we seek assurance that doctors continue to meet these professional standards throughout their careers.

Our core guidance, [Good medical practice](#), requires doctors to be competent in all aspects of their work, to keep their professional knowledge and skills up to date, and to recognise and work within the limits of their competence. It requires them to demonstrate through the revalidation process that they work in line with the principles and values of the guidance.

Lifelong learning

We also provide guidance on [Continuing professional development](#) (CPD) to support all doctors in their professional development and practice, outside of undergraduate education or postgraduate training. It stresses the importance of updating their learning to reflect changes in practice, and to keep up to date.

Our role in overseeing doctors' education and training

As the medical regulator, we set [the standards doctors and those who train them need to meet](#), and help them achieve them. We work with partners to make sure that education and training outcomes prepare doctors to deliver good, safe patient care across the UK. We do this by approving the undergraduate and postgraduate training programmes and assessments doctors must pass, and by carrying out reviews and regular monitoring. The educational standards we set are high level as they apply to all levels of medical education, and across all specialties.

The standards require postgraduate curricula to be mapped against a framework of shared generic and specialty-specific outcomes. The [Generic professional capabilities framework](#) sets out the essential capabilities which underpin professional medical practice and are a fundamental part of all postgraduate training programmes. Under relevant capabilities in the framework, we say that doctors in training must learn to:

- locate and use clinical guidelines appropriately
- participate in continuing professional development to keep their knowledge, skills and capabilities up to date
- recognise limits of their own competence and refer patients to colleagues with appropriate expertise.

Neurosurgery training

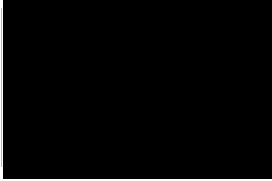
The curricula for specialty training are set by individual medical royal colleges and faculties, and we approve them against the standards for postgraduate curricula. The [neurosurgery curriculum](#) was developed and is owned by the [Joint Committee on Surgical Training \(JCST\)](#), and we approved it in 2021. It provides the approved UK framework for the training of doctors to the level of independent consultant practice in neurosurgery. The curriculum requires doctors to demonstrate technical skills and procedures in generic surgical skills such as incision placement and scalpel ability, but not at a level of detail which describes how doctors should carry out specific procedures.

Addressing your concern

As the standards we set for medical education and practice don't describe the details of specific procedures, we would refer queries on these to the [National Institute for Clinical Excellence \(NICE\)](#), medical royal colleges or specialty bodies. I note that The Society of British Neurological Surgeons (SBNS) has already responded to your concern with immediate action, writing to all SBNS members, asking them to recognise the importance of measuring depth intraoperatively, and empowering them to abort surgery when findings are not consistent with expectations.

We welcome the publication of this Report to Prevent Future Deaths as an important measure to raise awareness of the incident with those who can take action to prevent future deaths. I hope this information provides reassurance that our work to promote high standards in medical education and practice, alongside actions taken by others, will ensure a similar incident does not happen again.

Yours sincerely

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Medical Director and Director of Education and Standards

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