



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Maria Caulfield MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
Department of Health & Social Care*

*39 Victoria Street
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Andrew Bridgman
Assistant Coroner
South Coroner's Office
1 Mount Tabor Street
Stockport
SK1 3AG

9 May 2024

Dear Mr Bridgman,

Thank you for your Regulation 28 report to prevent future deaths dated 19 September 2023 about the death of Lauren Elizabeth Bridges. I am replying as the Minister with responsibility for mental health and patient safety.

Firstly, I would like to say how saddened I was to read of the circumstances of Lauren's death and I offer my sincere condolences to her family and loved ones. The circumstances your report describes are concerning and I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention. Please accept my sincere apologies for the significant delay in responding to this matter.

Your report raises concerns about delayed discharges from out of area placements in independent mental health inpatient settings.

In preparing this response, Departmental officials have made enquiries with NHS England and I understand that NHS England and Dorset Healthcare University NHS Foundation Trust have each already carefully considered the matters of concern in your report and have provided you with comprehensive responses setting out the actions being taken to improve care quality and patient safety.

The Department recognises that it is important that those who require inpatient care are treated as close to home as possible, which is why we publicly committed to eliminating all inappropriate acute out of area placements by 2020/21. Unfortunately, COVID-19-related pressures contributed to services missing that target. These pressures were caused by a number of factors, including bed closures due to the need for infection control; reduced community networks; staff absences; and higher levels of demand for NHS mental health services. However, I would like to assure you that that we remain committed to eliminating all inappropriate acute out of area placements for adults aged 18 and over.

All systems that still have inappropriate out of area placements have been required to refresh their local plans to ensure these placements are eliminated everywhere as soon as reasonably possible. NHS England continues to work with the worst performing areas and support them to improve and we are working with NHS England to ensure that systems prioritise this, including a focus on discharge and flow.

To support adult social care and discharges across the NHS, including from mental health inpatient settings, up to £2.8 billion was made available in 2023/24 and £4.7 billion in 2024/25, reducing bed occupancy.

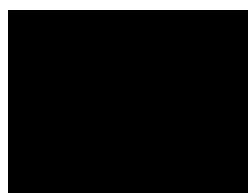
The Department has also worked with NHS England and other system partners to develop statutory guidance for discharge from all mental health inpatient settings, which was published in January 2024. This sets out how NHS bodies and local authorities can work together to support the discharge process, improving flow and ensuring the right support in the community. The guidance is available at: [Hospital discharge and community support guidance - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/hospital-discharge-and-community-support-guidance)

More widely, through the NHS Long Term Plan, we have invested almost £1 billion extra in community mental health care for adults by March 2024, expanding community mental health services to reduce reliance on inpatient treatment, so that patients are supported to stay well in their communities. This major expansion in funding for community mental health services commenced in all areas in 2021/22 and has been key to managing pressures on beds.

Turning to your concerns around an over-reliance by the NHS on independent providers for mental health beds, private companies have always played a role in the NHS and patients should expect a safe and good quality service regardless of whether their care is delivered by independent sector or public sector providers. As set out in NHS England's response to your report, all integrated care boards have been tasked with developing 3-year plans to localise and realign inpatient mental health care, including care provided by the Independent Sector, as part of NHS England's mental health, learning disability and autism inpatient quality transformation programme.

I hope this response is helpful. Thank you for bringing these concerns to my attention.

Yours sincerely,



MARIA CAULFIELD