



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*The Rt Hon Andrew Stephenson CBE MP
Minister of State for Health and Secondary Care*

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[REDACTED]

Darren Stewart OBE
The Coroner's Court and Offices
Beacon House
Whitehouse Road
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10 April 2024

Dear Mr Stewart,

Thank you for your Regulation 28 report to prevent future deaths dated 15 January about the death of Sarah Mitchell. I am replying as Minister with responsibility for health and secondary care.

Firstly, I would like to say how saddened I was to read of the circumstances of Miss Mitchell's death and I offer my sincere condolences to their family and loved ones. The circumstances your report describes are concerning and I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention. Thank you for the additional time provided to the department to provide a response.

The report raises concerns over a lack of process in place whereby accident and emergency (A&E) staff could access Ms. Mitchell's medical records detailing the medication she was receiving and the rationale behind the dispensing regime in place.

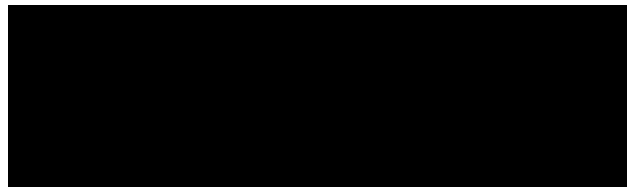
In preparing this response, Departmental officials have made enquiries with NHS England. As I understand, the James Paget University Hospitals NHS Trust (the Trust) has provided a response which gives an update on the investigative action undertaken and assurance around the Trust's prescribing policy. I trust their response addresses your specific concern around access to medical records for A&E staff.

Following this, I am aware that [REDACTED] in his capacity as Medical Director of NHS England too has provided a response. NHS England has provisioned a programme of work to transition records from the existing system to the new National Care Records Service (NCRS) service, which I note, by design will remove a large amount of the reported barriers to adoption within many care settings. NHS England is operationally responsible for delivering health services across the country and will carefully consider further responses provided by the Trust. I hope that as an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department of Health and Social Care, the response provided by NHS England has addressed your concern.

More broadly on prescribing, I refer you to the professional standards guidance from the General Medical Council which highlights that some categories of medicine may pose particular risks of serious harm or may be associated with overuse, misuse or addiction: [Controlled drugs and other medicines where additional safeguards are needed - professional standards - GMC \(gmc-uk.org\)](#). When prescribing, clinicians should follow relevant clinical guidance, such as drug safety updates on the risk of dependence and addiction associated with opioids. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has also issued relevant guidance on, “Prescribing of drugs associated with dependence and withdrawal symptoms”: [Overview | Medicines associated with dependence or withdrawal symptoms: safe prescribing and withdrawal management for adults | Guidance | NICE](#).

I hope this response is helpful and reassures you that concerns raised in your report have been taken very seriously. Thank you for bringing these concerns to my attention.

Yours sincerely,



Rt. Hon Andrew Stephenson CBE MP
Minister of State Health and Secondary Care