

Trust Headquarters
Health and Wellbeing Centre
Sandwell General Hospital
Lyndon
West Bromwich
B71 4HJ

Mrs Louise Hunt
HM Senior Coroner
Birmingham Coroner's Court
Steelhouse Lane
Birmingham
B4 6BJ

15 March 2024

Re: Dorota Marta Kuklinska (deceased)

Dear Mrs Hunt,

Thank you for your Prevention of Future Deaths letter of the 18 January 2024 raising the concerns you have regarding the NORSE referral pathway between Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust and University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust.

Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust (SWB) have communicated with University Hospitals Birmingham NHS Foundation Trust (UHB) prior to the inquest and since the hearing to establish the process for NORSE referrals.

As explained at the hearing, the SWB guidance follows best practice as informed by NICE Guidance 228 'Subarachnoid haemorrhage caused by a ruptured aneurysm: diagnosis and management'. Unfortunately, this guidance document does not offer a pathway for those instances where a patient with full mental capacity, makes the informed decision to refuse a lumbar puncture. In line with the Mental Capacity Act, Mrs Kuklinska was given appropriate information regarding the risks and benefits of the intervention and chose to decline a lumbar puncture. At this point, further investigations were not offered as they were not indicated in the NICE guidance.

Working with UHB, we have been able to establish their internal policies state that a 'urgent neurology opinion should be sought if a lumbar puncture is unable to confirm or refute the diagnosis of a subarachnoid haemorrhage'. SWB have committed to aligning our internal guidance with UHB by updating our clinical guidance for the management of subarachnoid haemorrhage to include a requirement to seek a neurology opinion for those patients who either refuse or have an inconclusive lumbar puncture result. In circumstances where a patient with full mental capacity has refused a lumbar puncture, they would of course have to consent to the referral being made to UHB for the neurology opinion. This amendment is currently going through our internal governance processes and will be recirculated to staff when ratified.

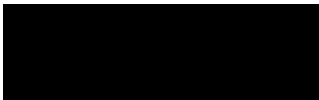
As an interim measure, the sad case of Mrs Kuklinska has been anonymised and used as a learning session with medical staff to ensure they are aware of the need for neurology referral.

There is also a plan to share wider communications with medical teams through our regular Chief Medical Officer Bulletin.

The NORSE referral guidance is an internal document held by UHB clinicians to support their management of referrals. This guidance is not shared with referring clinicians which explains the misalignment of opinion on the day of the hearing. Our decision to amend SWB's guidance to reflect that of UHB, will reduce future confusion. The policy amendments are anticipated to be signed off by 20 March 2024, with supportive communications following this.

I trust this information will provide you with reassurance regarding the concerns raised in your report, however, if I can assist with anything further, please let me know.

Yours sincerely

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature area.A black rectangular redaction box covering the name.
Chief Executive