



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Maria Caulfield MP
Minister for Mental Health & Women's Health*

39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Joanna Kearsley, Senior Coroner
The Coroner's Office
Newgate House
Newgate
Rochdale
OL16 1AT

13 May 2024

Dear Ms Kearsley,

Thank you for your Prevention of Future Deaths (PFD) report dated 3 May 2023 about the death of Sienna Barber. I am replying as the Minister with responsibility for patient safety.

Firstly, I would like to say how saddened I was to read of the circumstances of Sienna's death and I offer my sincere condolences to her family and loved ones. I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

As you may know, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) is the independent body responsible for developing evidence-based guidance for the NHS on best practice. NICE's methods and processes for developing guidelines are internationally respected and NICE keeps its guidelines under review to ensure they reflect the latest developments in evidence.

In your report, you raised concerns about the lack of guidance to specifically diagnose and treat group A streptococcus infection, as well as around NICE's publication of guidance in 2019 which did not recommend rapid tests for group A streptococcal infections in people with a sore throat. I am aware that NICE has responded to your report, citing relevant existing guidelines and the rationale for the negative recommendation on the rapid tests. I also understand from NICE that it engaged in discussions with both NHS England and the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA). I hope that the response provided by NICE has sufficiently addressed your concerns. Given NICE's independence, I hope you will understand that it would not be appropriate for me to comment further on NICE's recommendations or interfere in its processes.

There are two particular actions I wanted to highlight that I feel are relevant to the issues raised in your report. Firstly, due to rapidly increasing rates of Group A Streptococcus in children at

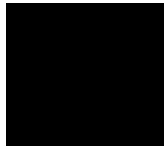
the end of 2022, NHS England published interim clinical guidance on the diagnosis and treatment of children with Group A Streptococcus on 9 December 2022. We also commenced a campaign intended to inform parents and carers about the symptoms of Group A

Streptococcus in babies and children, what to look out for and what action to take if they are concerned.

Secondly, in February the Government and NHS England announced plans to implement Martha's Rule in at least 100 acute or specialist NHS sites in England by March 2025. Martha's Rule is an initiative that gives patients and their families who are concerned about deterioration in their physiological condition the right to initiate a rapid review of their case 24 hours a day from someone outside of their immediate care team. When requested, this rapid review will inform whether any new or additional action needs to be taken to help ensure patients receive the most appropriate care and treatment – which may include escalation.

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

Yours sincerely,



MARIA CAULFIELD