



Department
of Health &
Social Care

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

*39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU*

[REDACTED]

Jacqueline Lake
Senior Coroner
County Hall
Norwich
NR1 2UA

[REDACTED]

24 May 2024

Dear Ms Lake,

Thank you for your Regulation 28 report to prevent future deaths dated 12 July 2023 about the death of Christopher Edward Sidle. 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 Christopher's death and I offer my sincere condolences to his 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 a shortage of inpatient mental health beds.

We recognise how important it is that people with mental ill health get the level of care that is appropriate for their needs, and we want to ensure that people have access to the right mental health support, in the right place, and at the right time.

Through the NHS Long Term Plan, we have invested almost £1 billion extra in community mental health care for adults by March 2024, compared to 2018/19, expanding and transforming community mental health services. The long-term aim set out within the NHS Long-Term Plan is to improve community support for those with serious mental illness to avoid the need for an inpatient admission where possible. As part of this, major expansion in funding for community mental health services commenced in all areas in 2021/22 which also aim to reduce pressure on beds. However, we recognise that there are occasions where a mental health bed is not available locally. The 2024/25 NHS priorities and operations planning guidance has a commitment to improving patient flow and working towards eliminating inappropriate out of area placements.

Timely discharge of patients who are ready to be discharged is important to free up beds for those who need them. 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/government/guidance/hospital-discharge-and-community-support-guidance)

For those in crisis, we are providing £150 million of capital investment for mental health urgent and emergency care infrastructure over 2023/24 and 2024/25. This includes investment into a range of wider local mental health infrastructure schemes, including new and improved crisis cafes, crisis houses, health-based places of safety and improvements to emergency departments and crisis lines. Over 160 schemes have been allocated funding by NHS England so far and 99 have been completed. The funding will also provide for specialised mental health ambulances which will be rolled out across the country – and be supported by practitioners trained to provide advice and treatments in cases of co-occurring physical and mental health issues.

The care Quality Commission (CQC) continue to monitor the mental health sector and Norfolk and Suffolk NHS Foundation trust (NSFT) through their regulatory monitoring powers. The CQC will also continue to work with and monitor the trust on an ongoing basis and, if there are concerns about risk to patients, will not hesitate to take action. Access to mental health care and the quality of the care remain a key area of concern.

The Department is also committed to ensuring that significant progress is being made in Norfolk and Suffolk to ensure that mental health services are of the high standard that patients and their families should rightly expect. This is why I met and will continue to meet with a range of campaigners, local stakeholders, the Trust and delivery partners to discuss progress on the Trust's improvement plan, improvements in mortality recording, and how we can better understand the number of deaths, as set out in the 2023 Grant Thornton report into the reporting of deaths at the Trust.

Whilst some improvements have been made, as set out in the most recent Care Quality Commission inspection report, it is clear that vital improvements are needed to be made and embedded to address the very significant challenges that remain. The Trust must be transparent and engage closely with families and local stakeholders as it aims to continue to make progress with its partners in improving mental health support in the area.

The Trust is in the national Recovery Support Programme, which means it is subject to the highest degree of national oversight in segment 4 of the NHS Oversight Framework. NHS England is providing the Trust with focused and integrated support, with a full-time improvement director in place, and representation in the trust's governance meetings so it has full visibility of the latest data on the improvements needed. It will work closely with the trust and stakeholders to ensure that the recent progress made continues and is built on.

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

Yours sincerely,



MARIA CAULFIELD MP