

8th Floor
Alpha Tower
Suffolk Street
Queensway
Birmingham
B1 1TT

14th June 2024

[REDACTED]
Birmingham and Solihull
Solihull Coroner's Court
Steinhouse Lane
[REDACTED]
B4 6BJ

Dear Mr Hodson

Re: Prevention of Future Deaths – Ronald Henry Spencer

I am writing in response to your Prevention of Future Deaths report dated 23rd April 2024, in relation to the recent investigation into the circumstances surrounding the death of Ronald Henry Spencer. NHS Birmingham and Solihull (BSol ICB) and University Hospitals Birmingham (UHB) would like to take this opportunity to offer sincere condolences to Mr Spencer's family at this time and offer assurances that we have carefully considered the issues that arose during the inquest and will use this time to ensure that lessons are learned for patients and the public in the future.

In response to matters of concern in relation to staff shortages at UHB, it is noted that the Inquest found no evidence to suggest that the standard of clinical care provided to Mr Spencer contributed to his death. However, we recognise that at the time of his death there was an unprecedented strain on the general surgical consultant workforce at UHB as a result of unanticipated sickness absence of three surgeons. Steps had been taken to mitigate the impact of the exceptional workforce pressures which included arranging for two senior fellows, both of whom had completed registrar training, to "act up" and cover any identified gaps on the consultant rota. Both fellows were considered to be sufficiently skilled and experienced and consultant support was also put in place so that there was oversight of their temporary roles.

Since the time of Mr Spencer's admission in December 2023, three locum consultants in emergency surgery have been appointed as well as an academic colorectal consultant. As a result, there is increased resilience in the emergency surgery rota than was the case when Mr Spencer was admitted.

It has also been recognised that the current staffing model in place, which includes four dedicated esophago-gastric consultants running the specialist upper GI on-call service for the region, may represent an additional vulnerability within the service, particularly at times of increased demand. The UHB upper GI service has recently undergone an independent invited review which has been conducted by the East Midlands Clinical Senate. The review encompassed all aspects of elective and emergency upper GI care at the QEH. The final report is awaited, but it is anticipated that recommendations will likely include reviewing the current esophago-gastric service configuration and increasing the number of consultants

covering the upper GI on-call rota. All recommendations will be considered and implemented, where appropriate, which will further support service resilience.

In addition to the above and recognising the impact of increased urgent and emergency admissions on our healthcare system, there are also plans underway to open the refurbished elective surgical hub at Solihull Hospital in September 2024. There has been significant investment in the hub which includes six new operating theatres and will enable an additional 11,500 procedures a year for patients from Birmingham and Solihull, thereby alleviating pressure on bed occupancy and treatment capacity across the Trust.

BSol ICB recognises the need for a workforce that is sufficient in numbers and skills to care for patients throughout the calendar year and works with all system partners to ensure this. We are also committed to the introduction of the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan.

In June 2023, BSol ICB carried out a high-level diagnostic of the current and future workforce looking at both demand and supply drawing upon BSol strategy and operational documents. It identified that workforce is an immediate and urgent priority for the ICB and supports the system in responding to the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan and Framework 15.

The workforce diagnostic recommended system-wide action in four areas using trend breaking action to help achieve in-year operational plans in terms of activity, finance and workforce. The actions fall into four workstreams (4R's), these are:

- Reconnecting with our staff.
- Recruit, Retain and Train.
- Resilience - reduce reliance on contingent workforce actions including temporary staffing.
- Reform – redistributing skills and resources to deliver redesigned future services.

In October 2023, the BSol ICS Workforce Programme Board was established to provide oversight and support delivery of the 4R's Workforce Delivery Framework, this group reports directly into the BSol ICS People Committee.

The 4R's Workforce Delivery Framework is now operational and significant resource has been allocated to support implementation over the next two years. This investment will be used to sustain the delivery of existing programmes where they have been identified as supporting the 4R's as well as a range of additional priorities identified as part of the Workforce Diagnostic.

The investment received will be used to:

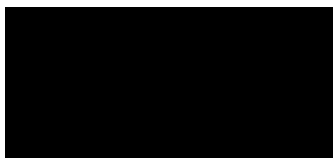
- Implement the 'new staff offer'.
- Deliver key programmes of work that have been identified as critical to address the risks and challenges identified within the workforce diagnostics which will enable:
 - moving to a more sustainable workforce model with reduced reliance on temporary staffing.
 - investment in the retention of health and care workforce.
 - support system-wide training and development programmes.
 - setting the foundations for implementation of the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan.



The BSol ICB Finance and Performance Committee and People Committee receive detailed workforce data reports at their meetings. The reports focus on a range of workforce indicators including staff in post, vacancies, sickness absence and turnover with focused discussion on the actions to support organisations being taken at a system level including the 4R's Workforce Delivery Framework. Where appropriate workforce, training and education issues are also discussed and reported via the BSol System Quality Group.

If we can be of any further assistance at this time, please do contact me.

Yours sincerely

A large black rectangular box redacting the signature of the Chief Executive.

Chief Executive



