



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Baroness Merron
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State
For Patient Safety, Women's Health
and Mental Health.*

39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

Our Ref: [REDACTED]

Andrew Bridgman
Assistant Coroner for South Manchester
1 Mount Tabor Street
Stockport
SK1 3AG

By Email: [REDACTED]

3 September 2024

Dear Mr Bridgman,

Thank you for your Regulation 28 report to prevent future deaths dated 14 June 2024 about the death of Amina Ahmed Ismail. I am replying as the Minister for Patient Safety, Mental Health and Women's Health.

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

I understand your concerns about the funding of mental health services, the reliance by the NHS on independent providers for mental health beds and the availability and funding of specialist personality disorder rehabilitation units. I note that you have also addressed these matters of concern to the Chief Executive of NHS England. I look forward to seeing her response and working with NHS England where appropriate, to avoid a repetition of the tragic events of this case.

I recognise the impact that a suitable bed not being available can have on a patient's care, as exemplified in Amina's case.

I am sure you will appreciate that the number of mental health inpatient beds required to support a local population is dependent on both local mental health need and the effectiveness of the whole local mental health system in providing timely access to care and supporting people to stay well in the community, therefore reducing the likelihood of an inpatient admission being necessary.

I expect individual trusts and local health systems to effectively assess and manage bed capacity, the 'flow' of patients being discharged or moving to another setting and the availability of specialist personality disorder rehabilitation units. I understand that mental health services have been under significant strain in recent years due to the rise in demand and the Department will continue to work with the NHS to maximise capacity.

Over the past few years, the NHS has been developing the community mental health framework to improve community support for people with severe mental illness, thus avoiding the need for an inpatient admission where possible and freeing up more beds.

NHS England's 2024/25 priorities and operational planning guidance reinforces this focus on improving patient flow as a key priority – with local health systems directed to reduce the average length of stay in adult acute mental health wards to deliver more timely access to local beds. And in areas where there is a clear need for more beds, this has been addressed in part through investment in new units, as part of a this whole system transformation approach.

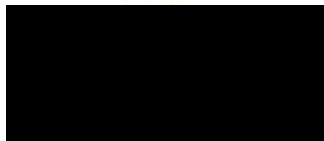
As part of our mission to build an NHS fit for the future , we will make sure mental health care is delivered in the community, close to people's homes, through new models of care and support, so that fewer people need to go into hospital.

Turning to your concerns around the reliance by the NHS on independent providers for mental health beds, independent providers have always played a role in the NHS and I am clear that patients should expect a safe and good quality service regardless of whether their care is delivered by independent sector or public sector providers.

In 2022 NHS England launched the mental health, learning disability and autism inpatient quality transformation programme. A core aim of the programme is to localise and realign care, harnessing the potential of people and communities. The programme is built upon the cornerstones of good mental healthcare; continuity of care, therapeutic relationships and a commitment to mental health care meeting the needs of the population. All integrated care boards have been tasked by NHS England with developing 3-year plans to localise and realign inpatient mental health care, including NHS-funded care provided by the independent sector, as part of this programme.

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

Yours sincerely,

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of Baroness Merron.

BARONESS MERRON