

REGULATION 28: REPORT TO PREVENT FUTURE DEATHS

This report details the steps taken by The Pike Practice following the death of Mr Allan Robin Hamilton who died of lobar pneumonia after a request for advice from his GP practice via email.

It is important to note that at no point has The Pike Practice informed patients not to contact the practice by phone or encouraged the use of email. We do offer an online system which patients can choose to use should they wish. We have robust and clearly defined triage system for both calls and the online system. The practice does not expect or anticipate the use of emails as a means of making the practice aware of any medical issues – particularly anything serious. The emergency services (999 and even 111) are there for serious issues which is well known by the general patient population. This set-up is consistent with most GP surgeries in the UK. The coroner's report should be amended to reflect these facts.

In the context of it being widely recognised that emails are not for medical use, The Pike Practice, along with all SSP practices, has a structured system for managing emails. Each email is read, reviewed, and directed to the appropriate staff member. While this process was in place and adhered to at the time of the incident, the email in question was not read within the usual 48-hour window, resulting in a delay of 24 hours beyond our usual internal standard timeframe.

Our automated email response informs patients that this inbox is intended for non-urgent inquiries, such as prescription requests and general queries.

The patient would have seen the following response on the 14th of November 2023:

Thank you for your email, we aim to respond to you within 48 hours of receiving your query. If you have not received a response, please contact 01457 832561. For appointments, we ask that you use our online consultation form as per NHS Guidelines; it is a quick and easy process that is available 24/7. You can use this form through the Patient Access app or through our practice website <https://www.ssphealth.com/our-practices/the-pike-practice> . For medication, please be advised that it can take up to 48 hours for your prescription request to be actioned. We ask that you do not submit a request on the day you run out of your medication as we cannot guarantee this will be actioned on the same day.

As an outcome, upon review, we have updated the automated response to clearly reinforce what is commonly understood, i.e. that emails are for non-urgent enquiries only and the emergency services should be contacted in such circumstances. Please see below, the updated automated response:

THIS EMAIL SERVICE IS NOT FOR EMERGENCY OR IMMEDIATE RESPONSES FROM THE PRACTICE.

'IMPORTANT' – PLEASE CALL 999 IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING SHORTNESS OF BREATH, CHEST PAIN OR OTHER SYMPTOMS THAT MAY REQUIRE URGENT RESPONSE OR CARE THIS EMAIL MAY NOT BE SEEN BY ONE OF OUR STAFF IMMEDIATELY AND IS FOR NON-URGENT COMMUNICATIONS ONLY.

Thank you for your email, we aim to respond to you within 48 hours of receiving your query. If you have not received a response, please contact 01457 832561. For appointments, we ask that you use our online consultation form as per NHS Guidelines; it is a quick and easy process that is available 24/7. You can use this form through the Patient Access app or through our practice website <https://www.ssphealth.com/our-practices/the-pike-practice> . For medication, please be advised that it can take up to 48 hours for your prescription request to be actioned. We ask that you do not submit a request on the day you run out of your medication as we cannot guarantee this will be actioned on the same day.

In addition to the steps already mentioned, a monthly compliance audit has been implemented as a preventative measure. This audit reviews email response times to ensure the process remains efficient, with the automated patient response system fully operational.

Following the incident, the automated email response across all SSP practices was updated to stress the importance of seeking urgent medical attention for life-threatening or serious symptoms. The message now includes relatable examples, such as shortness of breath, to clearly guide patients on when to seek emergency care.

It is crucial to highlight that the email system has never been used for patient triage. For this, we have long relied on AccuRx and Online Consultations, which have been in place for several years as our electronic triage systems. This set-up is widely used across most GP practices in the UK.

The practice has robust and appropriate processes in place for managing emails. This was an isolated incident, which should have been directed, by the patient, to the emergency services (999 or 111) or, or as a minimum, a phone call to the practice. However, after a comprehensive investigation, a series of actions have been implemented or are in the process of being implemented:

- Response to family members (Appendix A)
- Timeline of events (Appendix B)
- Action Log (Appendix C)
- Update of Automated Email response across all SSP practices (Outlook item attached)
- Audits of the Email response times over a six-month period, showing compliance of response times (Appendix E)
- Governance Meeting Minutes (Appendix F)
- SOPs (Appendix G)
- The response to be added to all SSP practice websites.
- Educational communications via social media practice accounts
- Audit to highlight the automated email and audit of email responses to be a standing process across SSP Health
- HR discussions with staff
- Staff competency and updated by the practice manager.
- Meetings with senior management to discuss.

The deceased patient contacted the practice via email, which is clearly designated for non-urgent inquiries such as prescription requests and test results. At no point is email promoted

as a primary method of contact for emergencies. In fact, it is made clear that this is not the appropriate channel for urgent situations. All SSP practices, including The Pike Practice, have an automated email response in place that explicitly advises patients to dial 999 in case of an emergency. Please refer to the updated automated email response for details.

In response to the incident, a comprehensive set of measures were implemented during the investigation in 2023, with these efforts continuing to date. We are committed to ongoing improvements to prevent a recurrence of this nature.