

Mr Ian Potter

HM Assistant Coroner
Coroner area of Inner North London
St Pancras Coroner's Court
Camley Street
London
N1C 4PP

National Medical Director

NHS England
Wellington House
133-155 Waterloo Road
London
SE1 8UG

17 March 2025

Dear Coroner,

Re: Regulation 28 Report to Prevent Future Deaths – Sheila Josephine Wexler who died on 17 February 2024.

Thank you for your Report to Prevent Future Deaths (hereafter "Report") dated 15 January 2025 concerning the death of Sheila Josephine Wexler on 17 February 2024. In advance of responding to the specific concerns raised in your Report, I would like to express my deep condolences to Sheila's family and loved ones. NHS England are keen to assure the family and the Coroner that the concerns raised about Sheila's care have been listened to and reflected upon.

Your Report raised concerns over the risks posed by NHS use of NRS Healthcare for the provision of important healthcare equipment. Colleagues from NHS England's Medical Devices and NHS Supply Chain teams and London region have reviewed your Report and aided my response to the Coroner.

NRS Healthcare are listed on the NHS Supply Chain Framework for Aids of Daily Living, for the supply of basic living aids with no service or maintenance provision included in the Framework. The Framework does not include the provision of the lateral turning system. The contract for services described in your Report has not been contracted through NHS England's NHS Supply Chain team and our national Framework, but through the London Community Equipment Consortium, a consortium of 21 London boroughs/local authorities (LAs), in a contract awarded by the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care, Public Health and the Voluntary Sector running from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2028. The Coroner may therefore wish to refer your concerns to the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) or the London Consortium.

However, my regional London colleagues, together with the London Consortium, The Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea Council, and Westminster City Council have provided the below information.

Background

Following a successful procurement process, NRS Healthcare was awarded the equipment contract for the London Community Equipment Consortium in September 2023, supplying 21 of London's local authorities and associated acute, community and mental health providers.

There was a short mobilisation period for the new contract due to challenges with the transition process reducing the preparatory period to three months, with a consequential impact on staffing, loss of access to depot sites and the unfortunate lack of availability of any historical service level data during the transition.

This was further compounded by a cyber-attack affecting operations of NRS Healthcare and other community equipment services nationally over Easter weekend in 2024. NRS Healthcare was able to quickly establish a manual operation, but it took up to six weeks for them to recover full online systems and only in August 2024 was the backlog of cases and data gaps completed.

Regional involvement

Following completion of the transition to NRS Healthcare, feedback was received by the regional team from several providers. This feedback related to delays in accessing timely equipment, to support ongoing care at home in the community and to enable a timely and effective discharge.

To review, address and monitor these issues, weekly oversight meetings were initiated with members of the London regional team, the commissioners of the equipment contract (Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea/Westminster City Council) and key partners, to identify areas of concern, review core key performance indicators and monitor improvement trajectories.

Current position

Performance has improved to expected contractual levels following a significant recovery/improvement process, but timings were set back due to the cyber-attack.

Consortium-wide:

- 88% “delivery in time” performance across the board.
- 95% on “same day delivery” from Greenford depot, with >85% from Tottenham and Sidcup.
- “Next day” activities performing at 93% across consortium.
- Key issues relating to stock management and visibility are largely resolved.
- Work to further refine the catalogue with clinical leads (occupational therapists) is in progress to:
 - a) ensure that all locally defined ‘special items’ are listed with ‘close technical equivalents’ clearly linked, and
 - b) reduce the number of products in key, high volume, order lines to enable NRS to manage the supply chain more effectively

The statistics quoted above are from the period of November 2024 but remain broadly consistent and refer to all deliveries across the catalogue for 21 Boroughs. Commissioners are provided with a monthly picture of these performance metrics.

NRS Healthcare actions

- NRS Healthcare have mobilised significant additional senior management and executive presence to oversee and ensure that the London Community Equipment Consortium contract is performing and meeting the needs of prescribers, patients, and their families.
- Following earlier challenges with performance, NRS Healthcare implemented a refreshed complaints and escalation process for prescribers and local contract leads.
- During 2023/4, permission was granted for NRS Healthcare to use its Business Continuity Plan to invest in additional cleaning and recycling capacity at a site named London North. This assisted with reducing the backlog and increasing stock availability.
- Specific interventions have taken place at key sites and Boroughs experiencing challenges were identified.
- This has been successful in identifying and addressing issues as early as possible.
- NRS Healthcare has appointed dedicated 'Community Engagement Officers' to build relationships with prescribers and provide support on-site where issues arise. These roles have been particularly helpful working with teams in Discharge Hubs at hospital sites and Community Health Trusts.
- Training days for prescribers have been made available by NRS Healthcare where specific needs have been identified.
- NRS Healthcare have been highly responsive when made aware of issues and see them through to resolution.

Ongoing governance

The London Community Equipment Consortium has robust governance in place to oversee the contract. This includes:

- Directors' Board for key strategic decisions, meeting quarterly.
- Consortium for collective oversight of contract management, finances, and the NRS improvement plan, which meets monthly.
- Contract Management Board for local contract leads to hear responses and updates from NRS Healthcare, coordinated through the consortium team. This meets monthly.
- Regular Equipment Review Groups managed by a Clinical Lead with Occupational Therapy representatives from across the consortium to manage the catalogue. This meets at least monthly.
- A series of workstreams established to address any live areas for development, including invoicing, IT, data validation, and stock controls.
- Access to community equipment is identified on the regional risk register and remains under monthly review.
- Fortnightly oversight meetings with ICB discharge leads and social care are in place to identify any specific pathway delays, which includes any related community equipment supply challenges.
- NHS England's London regional team continue to meet with the equipment commissioners and key partners to oversee and monitor key performance indicators, to support consortium members and associated providers.

North Central London Integrated Care Board

[North Central London Integrated Care Board \(NCL ICB\)](#), who plan the health services in the area where Sheila was from, have also been undertaking significant work with the London Consortium and NRS Healthcare over the past year.

NCL ICB advise that there were issues with the transfer of services from the previous provider to NRS Healthcare. The cyber-attack in 2024 suffered by NRS Healthcare (referenced above) further exacerbated issues with their responsiveness to concerns, and issues with NRS Healthcare were escalated by providers in a timely way to the ICB last year. Throughout 2023, NCL ICB had received several concerns, patient safety incidents and complaints relating to the delivery and collection of equipment. However, the number of complaints has now reduced significantly in a relatively short space of time.

The concerns were escalated to the London Regional Quality Group (part of formal NHS governance processes), where they have been escalated to the national team at NHS England and have been discussed at the regional Chief Nurses' meeting.

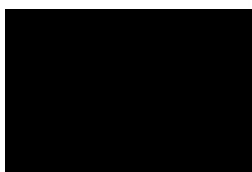
Although improvements have been made, some issues continue to be reported by clinical teams in relation to the timeliness of delivery of equipment. Across NCL, these issues are managed through the four Local Authorities across Barnet, Camden, Haringey and Islington.

NCL ICB have supported their healthcare providers in negotiations with NRS Healthcare, as well as LA colleagues, to resolve the issues, recognising that oversight and management of the contract and accountability is the responsibility of the London Community Equipment Consortium.

I would also like to provide further assurances on the national NHS England work taking place around the Reports to Prevent Future Deaths. All reports received are discussed by the Regulation 28 Working Group, comprising Regional Medical Directors, and other clinical and quality colleagues from across the regions. This ensures that key learnings and insights around events, such as the sad death of Sheila, are shared across the NHS at both a national and regional level and helps us to pay close attention to any emerging trends that may require further review and action.

Thank you for bringing these important patient safety issues to my attention and please do not hesitate to contact me should you need any further information.

Yours sincerely,





National Medical Director