

Dr Karen Henderson

HM Coroner's Court
Station Approach
Woking
GU22 7AP

23 May 2025

Dear Dr Henderson,

Further to your Prevention of Future Deaths (PFD) Notice issued on 13th May 2025, following the conclusion of your inquest (3rd March 2025) into the death of Rose Annie Harfleet (aged 12 years) who died on 30th January 2024, we would like to extend our sympathy and condolences to Rose's family and friends.

Rose and her mother attended the emergency department (ED) of Royal Surrey County Hospital, on the 29th January 2024, with symptoms of intestinal obstruction. From your PFD notice it appears the need for surgical assessment was recognised but this did not happen before or after transfer to a children's ward.

Regarding your specific concerns:

1. The management of children with profound disabilities within a hospital setting

In September 2024, the Royal College of Emergency Medicine (RCEM) published a Learning Disabilities Toolkit [1]. This resource includes information about how best to approach the management of people with a learning disability and suggestions on how to make reasonable adjustments in an ED setting. The toolkit also makes specific mention of intra-abdominal pathology and aspiration. The RCEM also provide additional online educational resources related to Learning Disabilities [2]. The RCEM feel it would not be appropriate to comment about the care delivered in the in-patient setting.

2. Guidelines - consultation with parents and guardians of children with profound disabilities within a hospital setting

The RCEM Learning Disability Toolkit [1] emphasises the importance of listening to family and carers of people with a learning disability in the ED. The RCEM are represented in the group developing the ED version of the national paediatric early warning system (nPEWS) with NHS England. A key component of the nPEWS (and the current draft of the emergency department specific nPEWS score - EDnPEWS) is parental/carer concern [3]. The response from the parent/carer is built into the escalation response. The RCEM is also supportive of the work just commencing via NHS England's Patient Safety Collaborative, which is looking to test the use of Martha's Rule in the ED setting. We would also note

that not only does the RCEM Learning Disabilities Toolkit promote specific education and training for ED staff with regards learning disabilities, we recognise that this training is also a mandatory requirement for all healthcare staff [\[4\]](#) and is often delivered very successfully through the eLearning for Health platform [\[5\]](#) as the Oliver McGowan Mandatory Training on Learning Disability and Autism.

3. Nursing and Medical care on the ward

The RCEM feel it would not be appropriate to comment about the care delivered in the in-patient setting.

4. The Role of the Learning Disability Nurse

The RCEM is fully supportive of Learning Disability Nurses taking on a liaison role within the ED setting for appropriate patients. The RCEM Learning Disability toolkit specifically recommends that a member of the ED staff is identified as a link with the hospital learning disability team. The provision of Learning Disability Nurses within individual hospitals is outside of the remit of the RCEM.

Thank you for bringing Rose's tragic case to our attention. I hope that the above response gives some reassurance that the RCEM are working to highlight the health inequalities suffered by people with a learning disability and providing resources for EDs to improve the care they deliver.

Yours sincerely,

A black rectangular box redacting the signature of the Chair of the Quality in Emergency Care Committee.A black rectangular box redacting the name of the Chair of the Quality in Emergency Care Committee.

Chair, Quality in Emergency Care Committee
Royal College of Emergency Medicine

References

1. [Learning Disabilities Toolkit v2.pdf](#) (Accessed 15.05.2025)
2. <https://www.rcemlearning.co.uk/?s=learning+disability> (Accessed 15.05.2025)
3. [pews-observation-and-escalation-chart-5-12-years-updated.pdf](#) (Accessed 15.05.2025)
4. <https://www.cqc.org.uk/guidance-providers/training-staff-support-autistic-people-and-people-learning-disability> (Accessed 15.05.2025)
5. https://portal.e-lfh.org.uk/Catalogue/Index?HierarchyId=0_58299_58300&programmId=58299 (Accessed 15.05.2025)