



By email
Mr Darren Stewart
Assistant Coroner for the coroner area of Surrey
[REDACTED]

27 May 2026

Dear Mr Stewart

Thank you for your "*Regulation 28: report to prevent future death*" concerning the death of Mr Gary Starbuck.

We were saddened to read of the circumstances surrounding Mr Starbuck's death and extend our condolences to his family and loved ones.

The College notes that the coroner did not conclude that Mr Starbuck's death was preventable, but identified wider systemic concerns which go beyond a single provider failure, and relate to the consistency of standards and pathways between the NHS and independent sector care.

Specifically, your report raises concerns regarding the variation in the implementation of NICE cancer pathway standards, including referral to specialist skin multidisciplinary teams (SSMDTs) between NHS and independent sector practice. The report also highlights broader questions regarding governance, accountability and the consistency of clinical standards across different healthcare settings.

We recognise the importance of ensuring that patients receive safe, high-quality and consistent standards of care irrespective of whether treatment is delivered within the NHS or the independent sector.

Although the College is not a statutory regulator, it provides advice and guidance to those who design surgical services and to the wider surgical care team for all aspects of surgical practice. The College has consistently promoted the principle that equivalent standards of care should apply across both NHS and private practice. In particular:

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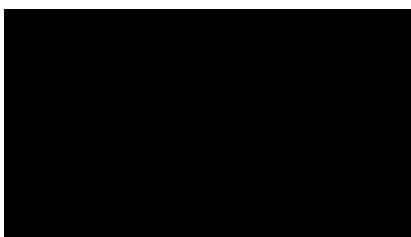
- The College's guidance *Working in the Independent Sector: A guide to good practice (2022)*¹ asks that the same standards of care are applied in both the NHS and in private practice. The guidance also emphasises the importance of multidisciplinary working and appropriate support for the management of complex patients.
- The College's core guidance, *Good Surgical Practice (2025)*², also explicitly applies to surgeons working both within and outside NHS practice and emphasises the importance of adherence to current clinical guidelines, multidisciplinary teamworking and coordinated care pathways in delivering safe, high-quality surgical care.

The College will draw the findings of this Prevention of Future Deaths report to the attention of relevant professional networks and stakeholders within the independent healthcare sector, including organisations involved in clinical governance and quality assurance. We will also continue to promote existing College standards and guidance relating to safe surgical practice, multidisciplinary working and equivalent standards of care across sectors.

Considering that the issues identified in this report concern wider system governance and regulatory arrangements relating to the implementation of NICE guidance within independent practice settings, the College would support ongoing dialogue between regulators, providers and professional bodies aimed at reducing unwarranted variation in standards of care between NHS and independent sector services.

We trust this response provides reassurance that the College has given careful consideration to the concerns raised and will continue to promote the principles of safe, high-quality and consistent surgical care across all practice settings.

Yours sincerely



Chief Executive

¹ <https://www.rcseng.ac.uk/standards-and-research/standards-and-guidance/good-practice-guides/working-in-independent-sector/>

² <https://www.rcseng.ac.uk/standards-and-research/good-surgical-practice/>

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