

The Inquiry into Hyponatraemia-related Deaths

Chairman: Mr John O'Hara QC

Ms Catherine Rodgers
Departmental Solicitors Office
2nd Floor
Centre House
Chichester Street
BELFAST
BT1 4JE

Your Ref: LIT 477/08/B5/CR

Our Ref: BPC-0001-11

Date: 31st August 2011

Dear Ms Rodgers,

Re Your Client(s): DHSSPS

I am writing requesting some information in relation to a UK Department of Health Hazard Notice issued on 17th October 1989. The Hazard Notice reference was HC (Hazard) (89) 31. I have enclosed a copy of the Hazard Notice for your attention.

I would be grateful if you would confirm whether this Hazard Notice HC (Hazard) (89) 31 or anything similar was ever issued to the health authorities in Northern Ireland. If the answer is yes, please confirm the date when the said notice was issued and provide a copy.

I would appreciate a response by Wednesday 7th September 2011.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,



Brian Cullen
Assistant Solicitor to the Inquiry

Secretary: Bernie Conlon

Arthur House, 41 Arthur Street, Belfast, BT1 4GB

Email: inquiry@ihrdni.org **Website:** www.ihrdni.org **Tel:** 028 9044 6340 **Fax:** 028 9044 6341



**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
HEALTH SERVICES MANAGEMENT**

To:
Regional Health Authorities)
District Health Authorities) for action
Special Health Authorities)

**BLOOD GAS MEASUREMENTS:
THE NEED FOR RELIABILITY OF RESULTS
PRODUCED IN EXTRA-LABORATORY AREAS**

SUMMARY

A recent incident has indicated that the use of blood gas analysers by untrained staff, without adequate management supervision of the equipment and without the use of quality control procedures, can give rise to misleading results, having the potential to affect adversely the treatment of patients.

ACTION

This information should be brought to the attention of all who need to know or be aware of it. This will include pathology laboratory staff and any medical, nursing, operating department and special care baby unit staff or others with direct access to blood gas analysers.

General advice on the management of equipment was published in Health Equipment Information, Number 98, January 1982. The advice given should be followed in the management of extra-laboratory analytical equipment and systems.

Careful and systematic selection of appropriate equipment is essential. It is particularly important to ensure that equipment has been designed for use by non-laboratory staff.

When purchasing consumables care should be taken to ensure reliable performance in conjunction with instrumentation. It is also recommended that the pathology laboratory is involved in the purchase, and maintenance, of all extra-laboratory equipment.

All staff who perform extra-laboratory blood gas measurements must be adequately trained.

There should be a written operational protocols for the equipment, which should be available to the user and preferably be attached to the equipment.

Routine maintenance of extra-laboratory analytical equipment is essential. Procedures should be in accordance with the equipment manufacturer's instructions and include a function of quality control check.

Independent quality control procedures on all extra-laboratory measurements should be carried out regularly, in collaboration with the pathology laboratory, to ensure that competence is maintained by all users and that the results are comparable with those produced by a quality-controlled laboratory-based instrument.

BACKGROUND

1. An investigation into an incident involving a neonate has shown that clinically-misleading results can be produced if blood gas analysers are not used exactly as specified by the manufacturer. In particular, where capillary samples are taken, it is essential that the capillary tube is completely filled. Failure to do this could give rise to unreliable results.

2. Such clinically-misleading results are particularly likely to occur where quality control programmes are lacking and where there is no formal training of staff, systematic maintenance or calibration of such equipment.

ENQUIRIES

3. Photocopies of Health Equipment Information, Management of Equipment, Number 98, January 1982 can be obtained from Mr J Nash at the address shown below.

4. Enquiries regarding this Circular should be addressed to Mr A N Horn, DH, NHS Procurement Directorate, 14 Russell Square, London WC1B 5EP (Tel: [REDACTED] Fax: [REDACTED]).

From:

NHS Procurement Directorate
14 Russell Square
London WC1B 5EP
(Tel: [REDACTED] Ex: [REDACTED] Fax: [REDACTED])

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for health authority use as instructed locally.

**TITLE: BLOOD GAS MEASUREMENTS:
 THE NEED FOR RELIABILITY OF RESULTS
 PRODUCED IN EXTRA-LABORATORY AREAS**

HC(Hazard)(89)31

17 October 1989

Sent to department
responsible for action:

Date

Action completed: Signature Location Date

Comments on action taken:

Return to after
completed action:

Date