

GUIDANCE FOR THE COMPLETION OF WITNESS STATEMENTS

Significance of Witness Statements for the Inquiry

1. The Inquiry will receive both written and oral testimony and it will largely decide whom to call to give oral evidence on the basis of the Witness Statements that it receives.
2. The provision of a Witness Statement is not simply a means of determining whom to call as a Witness; they are an important source of information in their own right and the Inquiry will expect to be able to rely upon them as an honest account of the Witness's evidence. It is important that the Witness Statement contains the full truth about the matters with which it deals and does not, for whatever reason, present a partial or bias account.

Identification of Witnesses

3. The Inquiry has already identified a number of persons from whom it wishes to receive written evidence and they have been issued with Witness Statement Templates indicating the areas that the Inquiry particularly wishes them to address and inviting them to provide any additional information that they consider is relevant to the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry. The Terms of Reference can be viewed at the Inquiry website at www.ihrdni.org.
4. Any one else who believes that they have evidence that is relevant to the work of the Inquiry can either contact the Inquiry or simply download a Witness Statement Template from the Inquiry website at www.ihrdni.org.

Preparation for a Witness Statement

5. It is improper for a Witness to be coached or trained about the evidence to be provided. A Witness can, however, seek general information on the procedure for submitting a Witness Statement.
6. Witness Statement Templates have been sent to the Solicitors for the interested parties and they will be liaising with their Clients and or the employees of their Clients in obtaining the Witness Statements. However, any Witness is entitled to prepare their Witness Statement separately and the Inquiry will send out a fresh Witness Statement Template directly to the Witness if requested. You can contact the Inquiry by telephone on 028 9051 7038 or by e-mail at inquiry@ihrdni.org or post at The Inquiry into Hyponatraemia-related Deaths, 3rd Floor, 20 Adelaide Street, Belfast BT2 8GB.

Structure and content of the Witness Statement

7. Witnesses can and should refer to relevant documentation and must attach a copy of all such documentation unless it is already displayed on the Inquiry website. References to documents on the website should include the unique document reference number, for example 020-003-006.

8. Any one providing written evidence to the Inquiry must do so by way of a Witness Statement Template issued by the Inquiry. The Template will provide a structure for the evidence but Witnesses should bear in mind that their evidence will be far easier to deal with if it is kept straightforward, so far as possible, in chronological order, with dates and individuals being clearly identified. Technical terms should be clearly explained and the use of acronyms either avoided or kept to a minimum.

Level of belief

9. It is extremely important that the Witness Statement clearly identifies the Witness's level of knowledge of an event: (i) actual knowledge, (ii) belief (including the basis of it), (iii) conclusion or deduction from other events (describing those events) and, (iv) information received from someone else (identifying the person and the circumstances).
10. Actual knowledge is very helpful but (ii) through to (iv) can also be very useful, especially where the basis is properly explained, and should not be excluded by Witnesses in the mistaken assumption that only actual knowledge will suffice.

Statement of truth

11. Witnesses will be required to date their Witness Statements and to sign the statement of truth endorsed on them.

Returning the Witness Statement

12. The completed Witness Statement should be e-mailed to the Inquiry Secretariat at inquiry@ihrdni.org and a signed copy sent by post to The Inquiry into Hyponatraemia-related Deaths, 3rd Floor, 20 Adelaide Street, Belfast BT2 8GB.

Supplemental Witness Statements

13. The Inquiry may ask a Witness to clarify matters in their Witness Statement, expand on them or deal with further matters. The Inquiry will make it clear what further is required and this guidance will apply (where appropriate) to all subsequent Witness Statements.

Publication of Witness Statements

14. Witness Statements of those who are called to give oral evidence will not be published on the website of the Inquiry until the Witness has given his or her oral evidence. All other Witness Statements will be published on the website once they have been formally read into the record of the Inquiry.