

From: Colm Shannon
Principal Information Officer

Date: 16 September 2004

To: 1. Secretary
2. Minister

RENEWED MEDIA INTEREST INTO DEATH OF LUCY CRAWFORD

Issue: To update Minister on the latest developments in the Lucy Crawford and Raychel Ferguson case

Timing: Urgent

Presentational Issues: The death of Lucy Crawford continues to attract considerable media interest from the Impartial Reporter and UTV. UTV is now believed to be preparing a new programme on the case and is likely to approach the Minister for an interview.

Recommendation: That the Minister agrees the lines to take.

Background

1. Minister is aware of the Lucy Crawford and Raychel Ferguson cases and the high level of interest that continues to be shown by both UTV and the 'Impartial Reporter' newspaper. A detailed briefing (Sub/179/2004) was prepared for the Minister in June for her interview with Denzil McDaniel, Editor of the Impartial Reporter.

2. UTV now appears to be preparing to broadcast an 'Insight' programme on the Lucy Crawford case which is expected to be shown in October. They recently asked the Royal Victoria Hospital for permission to film the outside of their building. It is also believed they have footage of senior members of the Sperrin Lakeland Trust which will be used in the forthcoming programme.
3. There may be a possibility that Minister might be 'doorstepped' by UTV and asked about the Lucy Crawford case. In preparation for such an event, lines to take are included in this submission.
4. UTV has not and, will not, let us know what slant the Insight programme will take. However, staff in the Sperrin Lakeland Trust are concerned that it will personally attack the Chief Executive, Hugh Mills and the doctor involved in the case, Dr O'Donohoe. The General Medical Council is expected to hold a preliminary inquiry over allegations of professional misconduct against Dr O'Donohoe around 22nd or 23rd September.

Issue

5. The Minister was approached by UTV in June to do an interview on the Lucy Crawford case. This bid was declined because of Ministerial commitments. No further approach has been received from UTV, however, any further bid would need to be considered in the context of the issues being addressed by the programme.
6. The attached lines are recommended for use in any doorstep situation. We will also alert information staff in other press offices to be aware of UTV's interest.

Recommendation

7. That the Minister notes the latest developments in this case and agrees the lines to take below.

COLM SHANNON
Principal Information Officer

cc Mr Gowdy
CMO
Colm Shannon

Key messages

- The death of a child is tragic and I want to offer my most sincere sympathy to Lucy Crawford's family.
- I fully accept the coroner's verdict on the cause of Lucy's death.
- I am not responsible for the individual actions of doctors. The coroner has referred the papers in this case to the GMC and therefore it would be inappropriate to make any further comment.
- I am satisfied that the Trust investigated the case properly and I see no reason for the Chief Executive to resign. What I would say, is that the Erne Hospital is a fine one, with dedicated, able and professional staff.
- I acknowledge that my Department did not know of Lucy's death until 2003. In 2000 there was no formal system for reporting deaths such as Lucy's. Today we are developing a mechanism for the reporting of untoward events in the Health Service.
- I am satisfied that the cause of Lucy's death was fully and comprehensively investigated by the coroner and I do not think that any further investigation is required.
- The circumstances surrounding Lucy's death and the subsequent inquest raised a number of important issues, which my Department is addressing, including the reporting of untoward events in hospitals and good records management.

- It is important that we learn from the lessons of Lucy's death and we have done so. Following the death of Raychel Ferguson from hyponatraemia in 2001, the Chief Medical Officer acted immediately to develop guidance that would prevent a similar incident happening again. This guidance has been incorporated into clinical practice since 2002 and is currently being reviewed in light of the verdict on Lucy's death and any emerging evidence.
- Under clinical governance arrangements introduced last year, my Department is strengthening the systems for quality assurance with Trusts. In particular, work is underway to improve the mechanism for reporting and investigating untoward incidents in hospitals.
- Accurate record keeping, found seriously lacking in Lucy's case, is a very important matter within the health service. My Department is currently working to ensure that measures are in place to maintain good medical record keeping.