

**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**

**Potential media questions (and some suggested answers) arising from the Rachel Ferguson inquest and our statement**

- What are the “procedures and practices” you refer to in your statement?

**Note:** The procedures and practices question may be fully answered at the inquest, in which case, this question may not arise

**Suggested answer:** The procedures and practices referred to are related to the observations, medications and treatments associated with post-operative care. They are things like blood-pressure monitoring, fluid management, wound care, and body temperature control. They are the things every hospital does to help ensure that patients make a complete recovery.

- Exactly what caused Rachel’s death?

**Note:** Again, the inquest may answer this question fully to the satisfaction of journalists but this will not necessarily stop the question being asked, especially in a radio or TV interview. We should be prepared to answer this question as fully as possible.

- This sounds like a tragedy waiting to happen. How long have children been at risk in Altnagelvin?

**Note:** This is emotive language but should be expected in this case.

**Suggested answer:** Children are not at risk in Altnagelvin any more than they are at risk in any other hospital in the UK. . Altnagelvin works to the highest professional standards and practices and as knowledge and experience expands, especially with new procedures, those standards and practices are changed or adapted accordingly. There are known risks associated with any operation and these are explained to patients or to parents before they consent to an operation

- How can parents be sure that when they bring their children to Altnagelvin for a routine operation, they will be bringing them safely home again?

**Note:** Again, emotive language but to be expected.

**Suggested answer:** Parents can be reassured that Altnagelvin Hospital applies the highest professional standards to the care and treatment of its patients. It is important to remember that Altnagelvin safely carried out XXXX operations last year including YYYY on children. Of course, one

tragedy like this is one too many but parents should be reassured that this is a very isolated case and that as a result of what we and other hospitals have learned, it will not happen again.

- **How are staff coping with this tragedy?**

**Suggested answer:** The staff involved with Rachel's care are deeply upset about her loss and about the grief being felt by her parents. They are trained to cope with loss and where it is expected, they take courage that their training and skills help people with terminal illnesses to die with dignity. However when it is the unexpected death of a child, it is very, very difficult, despite their training, for the staff to come to terms with.

- **Has the doctor whose care little Rachel was under, been suspended?  
If not, why not?**

**Suggested answer:** Our initial and subsequent investigations convinced us that no blame was attributable to any individual for this tragedy. The proper professional practices and procedures, similar to those in place in other hospitals in Northern Ireland, were all followed so there was no question of blame.

- **How can the public be sure that there are no other "procedures and practices" in Altnagelvin that might lead to this kind of tragedy happening again?**

**Suggested answer:** The public should be reassured that Altnagelvin practices in accordance with the highest professional standards as required by the various Royal Colleges in the United Kingdom. We constantly audit our work against those standards and ensure we keep up to date with new developments and new treatment options.

- **We hear about the risks to patients of infections like MRSA or even of being assaulted in Accident and Emergency departments and now we have a tragedy like this. Just how safe is Altnagelvin?**

**Suggested answer:** Altnagelvin is as safe as any hospital in the United Kingdom and we might argue, in relation to infection control for example, that we are safer than some. Of course, there are risks and it would be foolish to deny that. In any organisation open to the public 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 365 days per year there are all sorts of risks associated with bringing literally thousands of sick and well people together each year, or with treating people under the influence of drink and drugs or whose natural

anxiety and nervousness at having to come to hospital, spills over into anger and aggression. But we are here to care for people with professionalism and with care and compassion, and we work very hard to ensure that the environment in which we provide that care is as safe as it can be within the resource and other constraints in which we work. And in the vast majority of cases, given the huge numbers of people we treat, we do that successfully.