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Sent: 01 November 2004 10:06
To: Hall Janet; Jo McGinley (E-mail); Marie Dunne (E-mail); Dympna Curley (E-mail)
Subject: FW: Newspaper article



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FYI

> -----Original Message-----
> From: Robinson, Julie
> Sent: 01 November 2004 10:02
> To: Baxter, Clare
> Subject:
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Doctors face child deaths inquiry

by Henry McDonald
Ireland Editor

UP TO A DOZEN doctors and senior health service administrators are to be questioned under caution by police over the deaths of children in Northern Ireland hospitals, it emerged last night.

The *Observer* can reveal that as a result of complaints from John Lecky, the Belfast coroner, who is concerned about statements given by medical staff at an inquest into the death of 17-month-old Lucy Crawford, a police inquiry has been set up.

Those who will be questioned include some of the most senior medical figures in Northern Ireland, along with doctors directly involved in the care of Lucy, who died at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children following an earlier, and it turned out fatal, administration of fluid at the Erne Hospital, Enniskillen.

A spokesman for the Police Service of Northern Ireland confirmed that a Senior Investigating Officer (SIO) has been appointed to investigate cases relating to the deaths of a number of chil-

dren in hospital. It is understood that the SIO is Jim Gaunt who is based at Maydown Police Station in Derry. The inquiry into all the deaths is likely to take up to six months.

In an unprecedented step, the coroner has also reported a number of doctors at the Erne Hospital to the General Medical Council over witness statements they gave to at least one inquest into the death of a child. Lecky has sent a file to the GMC over his concerns about the Lucy Crawford case. She died from a condition known

as 'idiopathic hyponatraemia', which means she was given the wrong fluids and in an excessive amount after being taken to hospital over a mild case of gastro-enteritis in April 2000. The fatal dose caused her brain to swell or 'come' until she died.

It has been established that a fundamentally wrong death certificate was issued, stating that she died of gastroenteritis and dehydration. The police will be examining why a doctor at the Royal Hospital for Sick Children issued that statement to the coroner.

The hospital has failed to

explain why the doctor did this.

The PSNI has acted as a result of fallout from the Supreme Inquiry into the doctor from Hyde, Greater Manchester, who issued dozens of fake death certificates for patients he had killed.

There is absolutely no suggestion in the Northern Ireland cases of any malice in the children's deaths. However the PSNI inquiry will focus on allegations of medical negligence and cover-up by both doctors and health trust managers.

Allegations that Lucy and

two other children, Raychel Ferguson and Adam Strain, died through medical incompetence emerged on an *Usher* programme, 'When Hospitals Kill', last month.

The programme-makers exposed evidence that the coroner had been given incorrect information about how Lucy died and revealed that a whistleblower within the hospital was able to contradict the reasons for her death.

Raychel Ferguson's mother, Marie, called yesterday for a public inquiry into the children's death on the

same lines as that held over the illegal use of children's organs at Alder Hey Hospital in Liverpool.

Her nine-year-old daughter died after being admitted to Altnagavin Hospital in Derry on 10 June 2001. Although Raychel complained of stomach pains, the subsequent inquest found she was not suffering from what the doctors claimed was appendicitis.

According to the coroner Raychel was given an incorrect dose of fluids, which, as in the Lucy Crawford case, caused her brain to swell.

"The only way we can get to the truth is for a public inquiry into these deaths and other children in hospital to be set up. At the meantime, I'm calling on the doctors involved, senior medical officials and those heading the health trust to resign," Marie Ferguson added.

Barriester David McGillem QC, who has been given a report for the Northern Rights Commission by Northern Ireland on deaths of children in hospitals, said the cases showed clear and cover-up and collusion between staff and management.

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