

Young, Christine

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To: Gowdy, Clive; Campbell, Dr Henrietta; McCarthy, Miriam; Maguire, Philip; Baxter, Clare; Carson, Ian; Hill, Don; Hamilton, Andrew; Simpson, Paul; Sullivan, Dean
Cc: Edgar, Leona; McCoy, Clare
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Lucy's death raised in Westminster questions

As the inquiry into the deaths of three children in hospital begins to gather documents, the case of Letterbreen girl, Lucy Crawford has been raised in the Westminster Parliament.

The DUP MP, Iris Robinson, tabled a number of questions about the deaths of the children, including Raychel Ferguson, Adam Strain and Lucy Crawford and some written answers were given last week by Northern Ireland Health Minister, Angela Smith.

In one question, Mrs. Robinson asked: "What assessment the Secretary of State made of the explanation of the Chief Medical Officer of Northern Ireland to the parents of Lucy Crawford regarding their daughter's death".

Replying for the Secretary of State, Angela Smith said it would be inappropriate to comment on any matter relating to the death of Lucy Crawford during the inquiry by John O'Hara QC into Hyponatraemia-related deaths.

Mrs. Robinson has also pressed the Northern Ireland Office Ministers on a number of other questions, including what circumstances doctors in the Province may refuse to provide evidence in court during cases regarding patients who were under their care.

Also, in answer to the DUP member, Minister Ian Pearson confirmed that a senior investigating officer was appointed to carry out a (PSNI) investigation into the death of Lucy Crawford prior to the UTV "Insight" programme on 21 October 2004.

Furthermore, last week, Mrs. Robinson received written answers when she asked for information about the civil servants who were assigned to Mr. O'Hara. There was criticism following the launch of the inquiry over the fact that two senior Department of Health officials were working for Mr. O'Hara - considering the Department's role is sure to be scrutinised. Angela Smith said that the appointment of staff and their particular roles are matters for Mr. O'Hara. "As is normal practice, to assist him with the administration of the inquiry, the Department offered a number of civil servants to undertake administrative and clerical duties. Previously the secretary and deputy secretary to the inquiry were employed respectively as the manager of the office of the permanent secretary and the departmental private secretary to the Minister," said the Minister's reply.

The O'Hara inquiry is due to hold public hearings in Belfast at the beginning of February. Contrary to public perception, however, these are not hearings to listen to evidence. Such hearings would appear to be some time away, as the inquiry team continues to gather relevant documents.

The hearings, listed for February 3 and 4 at the Hilton Hotel in Belfast, are to hear submissions about the way the inquiry is being conducted.

Mr. O'Hara has outlined a draft procedure, which was issued a week before Christmas for public consultation.

Interested parties were asked to submit their views in writing, and the hearings in February will listen only to views about how the inquiry will be conducted and not the cases themselves.

Information on the draft procedure, the inquiry terms of reference and indeed a number of other statements from the Health Minister as well as the chairman, Mr. O'Hara have been posted on the inquiry website, www.ihrdni.org.