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17 January 2005

Mr John L Leckey LL.M.
H.M. Coroner
Coroner's Office
Courthouse
Old Town Hall Building
80 Victoria Street
Belfast
BT1 3GL

Dear Mr Leckey

Thank you for meeting with us on 4th January 2005 and as suggested we have enclosed a brief history of Claire.

As parents of Claire Roberts the following is an insight into our concerns regarding our daughter's diagnosis and subsequent treatment at the Royal Belfast Hospital.

Claire's medical history is as follows. Claire had normal early infancy up to six months when she started having epileptic seizures. The next twelve months involved several visits to the Ulster Hospital and a range of trials to establish a suitable medication level to control Claire's seizures. This set back in Claire's development, delayed her early progress and resulted in Claire having learning difficulties. Over the next few years Claire's seizures were controlled and stabilised using a measured dosage of medication. Claire was seizure free from about the age of six/seven years and her medication dosage level was being reviewed and reduced.

The above outline clarifies the statement made in a letter from the Royal Hospital to Mr J Leckey, Ref A.49/04/35/J which states "Claire had a history of epileptic seizures since age ten months".

Following the Insight television programme broadcast on 21 October 2004 we contacted the Royal Belfast Hospital to express our concerns over Claire's death. The Insight programme investigated the sudden death of three young children who died from similar complications at different hospitals.

As parents we relived every moment of the broadcast, which seemed to mirror our own tragic personal loss. Our precious daughter Claire died on Wednesday 23 October 1996 at the Royal Belfast Hospital, having been admitted with gastro-enteritis and high temperature symptoms on the evening of Monday 21 October 1996. Claire was administered fluid and a range of drugs throughout the next twenty-four hours.

We were with Claire for most of Tuesday 22 October and left the hospital at 9:30pm. During that time we were not unduly worried about Claire's condition and no indication or concern was directly expressed by any doctor to suggest Claire's condition was serious. Our feelings at that time were that Claire was settled and asleep with the hope that the next day would see a good recovery.

The hospital rang our home at 3:45am on Wednesday 23 to say Claire was having breathing difficulties and had been admitted to the intensive care unit. Claire was put on life support but sadly passed away on Wednesday evening.

We have had two meetings with medical staff at the Royal Belfast Hospital to discuss Claire's diagnosis, treatment and fluid management in relation to Hyponatraemia and a subsequent review has suggested there may have been a care management problem which significantly contributed to Claire's deterioration and death.

These discussions and enquiries have been very difficult for us as parents and highlight a number of questions which require definitive answers. We have forwarded a list of questions to the Royal Belfast Hospital but feel that as these are of a medical content an independent review is required.

We are therefore pleased that you have requested an independent expert report from Dr R Bingham of Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children.

We have also written to Mr J O'Hara QC who has been appointed to conduct an independent inquiry into the deaths of the other children.

Yours sincerely

Mr Alan Roberts