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Dr Henrietta Campbell
Chief Medical Officer
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Upper Newtownards Road
BELFAST
BT4 3SJ

7th November 2002

**RE: RACHEL FERGUSON, DECEASED
HYPONATRAEMIA IN CHILDREN RECEIVING INTRAVENOUS FLUIDS**

I understand you have been made aware by Altnagelvin Hospitals Health & Social Services Trust of the circumstances surrounding the death of Rachel. For your information I am enclosing copy correspondence which has been sent to me by the Trust.

In your letter of 10th May 2002 to Dr Nesbitt you state that the Department of Health was not made aware of the earlier inquest into the death of Adam Strain by either myself or the Royal Victoria Hospital. It is true that I did not formally notify the Department under the provisions of Rule 23(2) of the Coroner's Rules 1963 (copy enclosed). At that earlier inquest Dr Edward Sumner, a consultant Paediatric Anaesthetist at Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital, gave evidence and the opinions he expressed were not contested on behalf of the medical staff at the Royal Belfast Hospital for Sick Children. My clear understanding was that changes would be made in relation to the future management of cases such as that of Adam Strain. Therefore, I did not see a need for formal action pursuant to the Rule. Also, I assumed that there existed some mechanism for dissemination of Dr Sumner's opinions but it now appears that this is not the case. As you are aware Dr Sumner is an acknowledged authority on issues concerning children receiving intravenous fluids.

He is to be a witness in the inquest on Rachel Ferguson which is scheduled to take place in the Old Town Hall Building, 80 Victoria Street, Belfast on the 26th and 27th November.

Should I have reported the circumstances of the death of Alana Scott Cochrane to the Department? You will be aware that this was widely reported in the media last week. Certainly the circumstances of her death gave me cause for considerable concern but I received an assurance at the inquest that the Royal Victoria Hospital was reviewing its procedures.

I would welcome an opportunity to discuss such inquests with you or one of your colleagues. If you felt I should make formal reports to the department on a more regular basis I would certainly consider that. Also, perhaps you would advise me if there is a mechanism in existence for advising the medical profession of the outcome of such inquests and the opinions of independent experts called to give evidence.

I will await hearing from you.

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely

J L LECKEY
H M CORONER FOR GREATER BELFAST

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