

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SOCIAL SERVICES AND PUBLIC SAFETY

DATE FOR ANSWER: 18 December 2007

ORDINARY WRITTEN NO: AQW 2356/08

Iris Robinson: To ask the Minister for Health, Social Services and Public Safety to detail any discussions between his department, the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Public Prosecution Service in relation to the progress of the Inquiry into Hyponatraemia-related deaths.

Michael McGimpsey

I wrote to both the Chief Constable and the Director of the Public Prosecutions Service in June of this year to enquire about the progress of the investigation into hyponatraemia-related deaths. Replies were received in July and subsequently copied to Mr O'Hara for his information.

Date: _____
Signed and approved by the Minister for Health Social Services and Public Safety

BACKGROUND NOTE

1. Iris Robinson asked two similar questions (AQW 2159/08 and AQW 2160/08) for priority written answer on 5 December. This is one of a further four questions regarding the Inquiry into hyponatraemia-related deaths for answer on 18 December (see also AQW 2353/08, 2354/08, and AQW 2355/08). As with the earlier questions, the majority are similar to queries received by the Departmental Press Office from the television reporter Trevor Birney on 5 November. The response provided above reflects that already provided to Mr Birney.
2. On 1 November 2004 the then Minister for Health, Angela Smith, announced an Inquiry into the events surrounding and following the deaths of three children from hyponatraemia-related causes between 1995 and 2001. The Inquiry, chaired by John O'Hara QC, has been suspended since 28 October 2005 pending the outcome of police investigations into the deaths of the three children.
3. You met with John O'Hara on 31 May 2007 to discuss progress of his Inquiry. At the meeting Mr O'Hara expressed concern that the Inquiry could not proceed because of delays in the PSNI investigation and PPS decisions. You undertook to write to the Chief Constable and the Director of the Public Prosecution Service seeking clarification on when decisions might be forthcoming.
4. The response received from PPS gave a commitment to expedite the matter as quickly as possible. The response from PSNI indicated that any outstanding issues regarding the three original cases were nearing resolution but that it was also considering a fourth case.
5. It is expected that the Inquiry will recommence in the very near future. It will be for John O'Hara to decide whether to extend the remit of the Inquiry to include any additional cases.

Drafted by Jennifer Mooney, 5 December 2007

Cleared by Head of Division – Maura Briscoe, 6 December 2007

Cleared by Permanent Secretary - [DATE]

Cleared by Special Advisor - [DATE]

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Inquiry Into Hyponatraemia-related Deaths

Line to Take – 31 January 2008

The Minister remains fully committed to the Inquiry into Hyponatraemia-related deaths, which was suspended on 28 October 2005 to allow the PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service to complete their investigation of the individual cases concerned. It is anticipated that the Inquiry, under the chairmanship of John O'Hara QC, will soon be in a position to resume. The Inquiry will examine the care and treatment of the children and the actions of the statutory authorities and will report on any relevant matters. The Minister is determined that any lessons to be learned from these tragic deaths should be discovered and acted upon. In the meantime, new guidance has been issued to hospitals on fluid therapy for children.