

From the Permanent Secretary
and HSC Chief Executive

Dr Andrew McCormick

Fionnuala McAndrew, Acting Chief Executive HSCB
Eddie Rooney, Chief Executive PHA

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Date: 31 March 2014

Dear Fionnuala & Eddie

I have today written to Paul Cummings regarding the Northern Trust's care of a number of individual patients and clients and/or the handling of their cases and/or the response to their concerns over the past number of years.

In this letter, I am asking the HSCB and PHA, in view of these issues which have recently come to light, to carefully consider whether or not there are any implications for the current Serious Adverse Incident and Complaints Systems and provide your views to me by the end of April. I would also ask you to engage with the Northern Trust to establish what advice or support you can offer to them as they progress any ongoing investigations of these cases and to ensure that you are satisfied with how the Trust is responding or plans to respond.

On a more general point, it is clear from our discussions with the Northern Trust and from recent events surrounding adverse incidents and emergency departments that we need to expand on the existing guidance to the HSC on engagement with patients, clients and families as part of the SAI process.

In particular such guidance needs to make clear that litigation or legal proceedings should not be an obstacle to engaging with patients, clients and families.

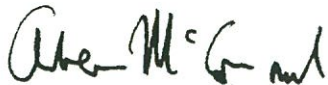
Engagement should cover:

- a) Advising patients, clients and families that the incident is being treated/investigated as an SAI;
- b) Offering them the opportunity to participate as appropriate in the investigation process;
- c) Sharing with them the findings in the form of an investigation report; and
- d) Providing them with information on the action being taken to apply any learning from the investigation.

While there may be some cases where there are good reasons for not engaging with patients/clients/families the rationale for this needs to be articulated, recorded and open to scrutiny/challenge by the HSCB/PHA.

I am asking you to put together a group to draft guidance on patient/client/family engagement as part of the SAI process with a view to sharing a draft of the guidance with the Department before the end of May 2014. This group should include representation from the Patient and Client Council and the Regulation and Quality Improvement authority.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew McCormick', written in a cursive style.

ANDREW McCORMICK

cc: Ian Clements
Mary McMahon
Maeve Hully
Glenn Houston