

CHAIR'S STATEMENT

ISSUED ON 12 SEPTEMBER 2023

1. I want to welcome everyone back to the Inquiry and hope that everyone involved with the Inquiry had a good summer break.
2. Members of the Inquiry team have continued to work throughout July and August except for Public Holidays. The Panel is very grateful for all the work that has been put in by the Solicitors team, the Administrative team and the Counsel team. The excellent work that has been done should ensure a full programme of work until December.
3. Let me turn to the programme for the rest of this year.
4. The Panel is grateful to the witnesses from AfM and SPFM represented by Phoenix Law who have now made statements and have fully engaged with the Inquiry solicitors. A huge amount of effort has been put in, both by the Inquiry solicitors, the administrative staff, Phoenix Law and most importantly by their clients. Many of those witnesses will give evidence in this room over the next few weeks and many others will have their statements read into the record. I have always said that the patient experience is at the centre of this Inquiry and the evidence which we will receive from those groups will form an important part of the picture that we need. That evidence coupled with all of the evidence heard last year will give the Panel a fuller understanding of the experience of Muckamore Abbey Hospital patients and their loved ones.
5. Some of those witnesses have not yet signed their statements. Upon receipt and review of those final statements a decision will be made as to how that evidence is received. It is important that those are received as soon as possible.
6. In relation to the patient experience evidence already given, the Panel has identified several themes it wishes to explore in detail. This being a public inquiry, it is important that we do as much in the open gaze of the public and interested parties as possible. I hope it is helpful therefore to set out what the themes so far identified are. This is not written in stone; it is a living list of issues and will no doubt change as the Panel hears further evidence. Please bear in mind that this list is based upon the evidence heard from patients and their loved ones so far, so it does not for instance cover issues such as the

installation and use of CCTV or staff or organisational issues which are still to be explored in evidence, nor does it include any new issues which might arise in the evidence we are to begin hearing today.

7. The broad themes so far identified are as follows:
 - Abuse, (including neglect, unexplained injuries and all forms of abuse described in the terms of reference)
 - Nutrition
 - Restraint and seclusion
 - Sedation
 - Medication, prescriptions and administration
 - Co-production (working with families and carers)
 - Admission (were admissions to MAH made appropriately) and ward allocation
 - Welfare activities, occupation, stimulation, and skill teaching
 - Dental care and hygiene
 - Patient supervision
 - Finance and Property
 - Discharge and Resettlement
8. These themes will of course be added to as seems appropriate as the evidence continues to unfold.
9. Although I previously announced that we would finish the whole of the patient experience evidence by the end of September 2023, I have had to extend that slightly to allow for the statement taking process to be completed. Nonetheless, we will finish the patient experience evidence in the week of the 9 October. In the week of 16 October we intend to start hearing from members of staff.
10. As many of you know judicial review proceedings were issued in relation to the Inquiry's request for patient notes from the Trust which we made in March of this year. The judicial review by the relative of a patient was partly heard last week and is ongoing. While making no comment on the merits or otherwise of the judicial review challenge, the reality is that the Inquiry's work with regard to the analysis of patient records is now subject to a significant delay because while that litigation is ongoing it has not been possible to receive any of the requested records from the Trust.
11. In relation to the six evidence modules about which we heard earlier this year, the Inquiry decided that further groundwork would be required before certain aspects of Module 6 could be addressed in oral evidence. Work has been ongoing in relation to Module 6 and we hope to be able to progress that module later in the year.
12. Once we have heard from staff at the hospital and also Module 6, we will move on to hear from the regulators and commissioners of the services and other

bodies mentioned in the terms of reference before finally turning to the management team at the hospital and the Belfast Trust.

13. There is obviously still a good deal of evidence to get through, but our focus will be on concluding all of the evidence in the Spring of next year.

Tom Kark KC
Chair MAHI