

**Dr Jim Livingstone**  
Director of Safety, Quality and Standards

**Dr Maura Briscoe**  
Director Mental Health & Disability Policy

**Mr Sean Holland**  
Chief Social Services Officer

## Rapid Response Report



Department of  
**Health, Social Services  
and Public Safety**

[www.dhsspsni.gov.uk](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk)

AN ROINN

**Sláinte, Seirbhísí Sóisialta  
agus Sábháilteachta Poiblí**

MÁNNYSTRÍE O

**Poustie, Resydènter Heisin  
an Fowk Siccar**

### Subject:

Preventing harm to children from parents with mental health needs

### For action by:

Chief Executives, HSC Trusts for cascade to :

- *Medical Directors*
- *Directors of Mental Health*
- *Directors of Nursing*
- *Directors of Social Care*
- *CSCG leads*
- *Allied Health Professionals*

Chief Executive, HSC Board for cascade to

- *Director of Social Care & Children*
- *Director of Performance Management & Service Improvement*

Chief Executive RQIA for cascade to:  
*Independent hospitals and clinics*

### For information to:

Chief Executive, Public Health Agency for cascade to:

- *Allied Health Professionals*

Director of Public Health, Public Health Agency

Director of Nursing, Public Health Agency

Assistant Director of Performance Management,  
HSCB

Chief Executive, NISCC

Prof D Woolfson, Head of School of Pharmacy, QUB

Prof L Johnston, Head of Nursing & Midwifery, QUB

Prof H McKenna, Head of Life & Health Sciences, UU

Dr O Barr, Head of School of Nursing, UU

Prof P McCarron, Head of School of Pharmacy, UU

Prof M Tomlinson, Head of School of Sociology,  
Social Policy and Social Work, QUB

Post Graduate Dean, NIMDTA

Director, Safety Forum

Chief Executive, Patient & Client Council

### Summary of Contents:

The purpose of this Circular is to highlight a number of safety issues for action by all mental health and children's services.

### Enquiries:

Any enquiries about the content of this Circular should be addressed to:

Safety & Quality Unit

Room D2.4

Castle Buildings

BELFAST

BT4 3SQ

Tel: 028 9052 2239

[qualityandsafety@dhsspsni.gov.uk](mailto:qualityandsafety@dhsspsni.gov.uk)

### Circular Reference: HSC (SQSD) 02/10

**Date of Issue: 23 March 2010**

### Related documents

S&Q Learning Communication 01/2009 *Patients with Mental Health Needs in the Acute Sector – Learning Lessons*

HSC (SQSD)(NICE) 47/08 NICE Clinical Guideline No 45 Antenatal & Postnatal Mental Health

[http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hsc\\_47](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/hsc_47)

Good Practice Guidance and Risk Assessment

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/good-practice-guidance-and-risk-assessment.pdf>

Co-operating to Safeguard Children

[http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/show\\_publications?xtid=14022](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/show_publications?xtid=14022)

CREST – Inter-hospital transfer of patients and their records

<http://www.gain-ni.org/Guidelines/protocol.pdf>

Filicide A Literature Review

<http://www.medicine.manchester.ac.uk/psychiatry/research/suicide/prevention/nci/>

Regional ACPC Policy and Procedures Amendment (2008)

[http://www.welbni.org/uploads/File/ACPC\\_Policy\\_Procedures\\_Amendments\\_-\\_PDF.pdf](http://www.welbni.org/uploads/File/ACPC_Policy_Procedures_Amendments_-_PDF.pdf)

Agreed Standards and Criteria for Information Sharing

<http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk/print/showconsultations?xtid=37918>

Report of the independent Inquiry Panel to Western and Eastern Health and Social Services Boards - May 07

<http://www.whssb.n-i.nhs.uk/lnews/index.html>

### Status of Contents:

For immediate action

### Implementation:

Ongoing

**SQSD material can be accessed on:**

[www.dhsspsni.gov.uk](http://www.dhsspsni.gov.uk)

Working for a Healthier People

Chief Medical Officer Group



Dear colleagues

## **PREVENTING HARM TO CHILDREN FROM PARENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS**

Mental health service users can be good parents, but new research from the National Confidential Inquiry into Suicide and Homicide (NCISH) and findings from investigations into the deaths of children have highlighted a rare but important risk to children when their parent or carer has delusional beliefs involving their children, or has a suicide plan involving their children. The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) are advising that staff in adult mental health services caring for a parent must always consider the child's needs and the potential for physical and psychological harm as part of multiagency risk assessment processes.

The content of the attached circular at Annex A has been reviewed by relevant professional colleagues in the Department and approved for regional dissemination.

I would ask you to bring this to the attention of relevant practitioners and key health and social care staff within your organisation. They should consider the best practice for their setting and take appropriate steps to minimise the risks to patients.

I would also like to draw your attention to the attached 'assurance template' (Appendix 2) which it has been decided to implement as a means of recording the response from the Trusts and Board in circumstances where SQS Circulars require action to be taken by a given date.

Yours sincerely




**Dr J F Livingstone**

Director, Safety, Quality  
& Standards



**Dr M Briscoe**

Director, Mental  
Health & Disability



**Mr Sean Holland**

Chief Social Services  
Officer

## **PREVENTING HARM TO CHILDREN FROM PARENTS WITH MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS**

### **ISSUE**

1. Child protection is everybody's business and all mental health services have existing statutory responsibilities for child protection.
2. NPSA/2009/RRR003 advises that, while mental illness can be compatible with good parenting, some parents with a severe mental illness are at risk of harming their children. Very serious risks may arise if their illness incorporates delusional beliefs about the child, and/or the potential for the parent to harm the child as part of a suicide plan. Staff in adult mental health services caring for a parent must always assess the potential for any risk to their child or children and ensure that identified risks are appropriately managed as part of multiagency risk assessment processes. Risks should also be considered for service users who are not parents but are in contact with children e.g. service users with child siblings or grandchildren. Concerns about patient confidentiality should never delay acting as soon as a problem, suspicion or concern about children becomes apparent.

### **NATIONAL CONTEXT**

3. The National Confidential Inquiry into Suicides and Homicides (NCISH) reviewed 254 homicide convictions between 1997 and 2004 in England and Wales where children were killed by their biological or step parents. Of these, 37% (94 out of 254) had a mental disorder including 15% with depressive illness or bipolar affective disorder, 11% with personality disorder, 8% with schizophrenia or other delusional disorders and 5% with substance or alcohol dependence.

### **LOCAL CONTEXT**

4. In light of a recent Independent Inquiry Report recommendation, the NCISH were asked to undertake a literature review into all aspects of child killing to increase the understanding of cases involving parents who are mentally disordered but where there were no pre-existing child care concerns. Its report *Filicide: A Literature Review* identified 14 child homicides in Northern Ireland, between 2002 and 2007 though it is not clear how many of these were filicide. The literature review can be accessed through the following link:  
[http://www.medicine.manchester.ac.uk/psychiatry/research/suicide/prevention/nci/inquiry\\_reports/](http://www.medicine.manchester.ac.uk/psychiatry/research/suicide/prevention/nci/inquiry_reports/)
5. The Understanding the Needs of Children in NI (UNOCINI) assessment process was introduced in November 2008 in response to a number of key developments. It was developed to promote greater consistency of approach and in recognition of the importance of completing robust, high quality assessments; including risk assessments as appropriate, to lead to informed

decision making and the promotion of positive outcomes for children. UNOCINI provides an assessment and planning framework to assist professionals in identifying children's and their family's needs. Consideration of parental mental health is an integral part of the assessment process. The Gateway Service receives referrals and is responsible for the completion of the initial assessment which will inform the future direction as regards case management. (Gateway Team contacts are available at Appendix 1).



6. *Promoting Quality Care: Good Practice Guidance on the Assessment and Management of Risk in Mental Health and Learning Disability Services* was issued by DHSSPS in September 2009. The guidance describes the principles of best practice to assist individual mental health and learning disability care professionals, multidisciplinary teams and the organisations within which they work, to make decisions about managing the potential risk that service users may cause to themselves or others (including the staff who care for them, their families, carers or the general public). Specific reference is made to the needs of children within the multi disciplinary risk assessment tool.
7. Adult mental health services should ensure:
  - All assessment, review, and discharge planning documentation and procedures should prompt staff to consider if the service user is likely to have or resume contact with their own child or other children in their network of family and friends, even when the children are not living with the service user.
  - If the service user has or may resume contact with children, this should trigger an assessment of whether there are any actual or potential risks to the children, including delusional beliefs involving them, and drawing on as many sources of information as possible, including compliance with treatment.
  - Referrals should be made to the Family and Childcare Team/Gateway Team via UNOCINI (Understanding Needs of Children in NI) as soon as a problem, suspicion or concern about a child becomes apparent, or if the child's own needs are not being met. A referral must be made:
    - a) If service users express delusional beliefs involving their child and/or
    - b) If service users might harm their child as part of a suicide plan.
  - The current project "Think Child, Think Parent, Think Family" which is being jointly managed by the HSC Board and SCIE is underway and the initial lifespan of the project is 3 years. It is anticipated that a Childcare/Mental Health Protocol will be in place within Trusts to address respective professional roles, facilitate positive communication and to ensure that the focus remains upon the needs of the child/children in such circumstances. Staff working in mental health services should be



given clear guidance on how to make such referrals, including information sharing without delay, the role of their organisation's designated lead for child protection, and what to do when a concern becomes apparent outside normal office hours.(see Appendix 1 for contact details)

- A consultant psychiatrist should be directly involved in all clinical decision making for services users who may pose a risk to children.
  - Safeguarding training that includes the risks posed to children from parents with delusional beliefs involving their children or who might harm their children as part of a suicide plan is an essential requirement for all staff. Attendance, knowledge, and competency levels should be regularly audited, and any lapses urgently acted on.
8. NPSA/2009/RRR03: *preventing harm to children from parents with mental health needs* is available at <http://www.nrls.npsa.nhs.uk/resources/type/alerts/?entryid45=59898>

### **ACTION REQUIRED**

9. We would ask you to bring the content of this document to the attention of relevant professionals and key health and social care staff within your organisation for consideration of local learning and action, where appropriate, and particularly those involved in governance and risk management who need to be aware of this best practice guidance in order to assist in complying with the *Quality Standards for Health & Social Care*:
- Criterion 5.3.1(c)(d) (ensuring safe practice and appropriate management of risk)
  - Criterion 5.3.3(c)(f) (promoting effective care including implementation of evidence-based practice through guidance, for example, NPSA guidance)
  - Criterion 8.3 (i) (l) (effective communication and information).
10. HSC Trusts should take immediate action to implement this Rapid Response Report as outlined above by **23 September 2010**. Trusts should provide assurance on this action to the HSC Board by completing **Section 2** of the attached template.
11. The HSC Board should complete **Section 1** of the attached assurance template and forward to the Department by **21 October 2010**.

<b>Belfast HSC Trust</b>			
Telephone (for referral)	028 90507000		
Areas	Greater Belfast area		
Further Contact Details (for ongoing professional liaison)	<b>Greater Belfast Gateway Team</b> 414 Ormeau road Belfast, BT7 3HY		
			
Website	<a href="http://www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/">http://www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/</a>		
Out of Hours Emergency Service (after 5pm each evening at weekends, and public/bank holidays)	028 90565444		
<b>South Eastern HSC Trust</b>			
Telephone (for referral)	03001000300		
Areas	Lisburn, Dunmurry, Moira, Hillsborough, Bangor, Newtownards, Ards Peninsula, Comber, Downpatrick, Newcastle and Ballynahinch		
Further Contact Details (for ongoing professional liaison)	<b>Greater Lisburn Gateway Team</b> Stewartstown Road Health Centre 212 Stewartstown Road Dunmurry Belfast, BT17 0FG Tel: 028 90602705 Fax: 028 90629827	<b>North Down Gateway Team</b> James Street Newtownards, BT23 4EP Tel: 028 91818518 Fax: 028 90564830	<b>Down Gateway Team</b> Children's Services 81 Market Street Downpatrick, BT30 6LZ Tel: 028 44613511 Fax: 028 44615734
			
Website	<a href="http://www.setrust.hscni.net/">http://www.setrust.hscni.net/</a>		
Out of Hours Emergency Service (after 5pm each evening at weekends, and public/bank holidays)	028 90565444		
<b>Northern HSC Trust</b>			
Telephone (for referral)	03001234333		
Areas	Antrim, Carrickfergus, Newtownabbey, Larne, Ballymena, Cookstown, Magherafelt, Ballycastle, Ballymoney, Portrush and Coleraine		
Further Contact Details (for ongoing professional liaison)	<b>Central Gateway Team</b> Unit 5A, Toome Business Park Hillhead Road Toomebridge, BT41 3SF Tel: 028 7965 1020 Fax: 028 7965 1036	<b>South Eastern Gateway Team</b> The Beeches 76 Avondale Drive Ballyclare, BT39 9DB Tel: 028 93340165 Fax: 028 9334 2531	<b>Northern Gateway Team</b> Coleraine Child Care Team 7A Castlerock Road Coleraine, BT51 3HP Tel: 028 7032 5462 Fax: 028 7035 7614
			
Website	<a href="http://www.northerntrust.hscni.net/">http://www.northerntrust.hscni.net/</a>		
Out of Hours Emergency Service (after 5pm each	028 94468833		

evening at weekends, and public/bank holidays)			
<b>Southern HSC Trust</b>			
Telephone (for referral)	<b>08007837745</b>		
Areas	Craigavon, Banbridge, Dromore, Lurgan, Portadown, Gilford, Armagh, Coalisland, Dungannon, Fivemiletown, Markethill, Moy, Tandragee, Ballygawley, Newry City, Bessbrook, Annalong, Rathfriland, Warrenpoint, Crossmaglen, Kilkeel, Newtownhamilton		
Further Contact Details (for ongoing professional liaison)	<b>Craigavon/Banbridge Gateway Team</b> Brownlow H&SS Centre 1 Legahory Centre Craigavon , BT65 5BE Tel: 028 38343011 Fax: 028 38324366	<b>Newry/Mourne Gateway Team</b> Dromalane House Dromalane Road Newry, BT35 8AP Tel: 028 30825000 Option 1 Fax: 028 30825016	<b>Armagh /Dungannon Gateway Team</b> E Floor South Tyrone Hospital Carland Road Dungannon, BT71 4AU Tel: 028 87713506 Fax: 028 87713671
	 Gateway Service for Children's Social Work <b>0800 783 7745</b>		
Website	<a href="http://www.southerntrust.hscni.net/">http://www.southerntrust.hscni.net/</a>		
Out of Hours Emergency Service (after 5pm each evening at weekends, and public/bank holidays)	028 38334444		
<b>Western HSC Trust</b>			
Telephone (for referral)	<b>028 71314090</b>		
Areas	Derry, Limavady, Strabane, Omagh and Enniskillen		
Further Contact Details (for ongoing professional liaison)	<b>Derry Gateway Team</b> Whitehill, 106 Irish Street Derry, BT47 2ND Tel: 028 71314090 Fax: 028 71314091	<b>Omagh Gateway Team</b> Tyrone and Fermanagh Hospital 1 Donaghane Road Omagh, BT79 ONS Tel: 028 66344103 Fax: n/a	<b>Enniskillen Gateway Team</b> 2 Coleshill Road Enniskillen BT747HG Tel: 028 66344103 Fax: n/a
	 Gateway Service for Children's Social Work <b>028 71314090</b>		
Website	<a href="http://www.westerntrust.hscni.net/">http://www.westerntrust.hscni.net/</a>		
Out of Hours Emergency Service (after 5pm each evening at weekends, and public/bank holidays)	028 71345171		

**SQS CIRCULARS: ASSURANCE TEMPLATE FOR HSC TRUSTS**

**Circular number:** HSC (SQSD) 02/10: Preventing harm to children from parents with mental health needs

**For Implementation by:** 23 September 2010

(Section 2 is to be completed by HSCT and forwarded to HSCB for consideration. Section 1 should then be completed by HSCB and forwarded to DHSSPS)

**SECTION 1:**

To: Director, Safety, Quality & Standards Directorate, DHSSPS

I note the response from the Trust and –

I can confirm that the HSC Board is content the action(s) taken referred to in Section 2 below, complies with the requirements of the above circular.

I can confirm that the HSC Board is monitoring compliance with the above circular and has requested that further action is taken as follows:

I confirm that the Chief Executive and designated senior manager have been advised of this response and are content that it should be submitted to the Department.

Response submitted by: \_\_\_\_\_ (Name & contact details of person submitting response) on behalf of HSC Board. Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**SECTION 2:**

To: Chief Executive, HSC Board

I can confirm that the required actions set out in the above circular have been implemented in full by the due date.

I can confirm that the actions in the above correspondence have been partially implemented by the due date. Work is ongoing in the following areas:

I can confirm that the organisation has been unable to implement any actions of the above circular for the following reasons:

I confirm that the Chief Executive and designated senior manager have been advised of this response and are content that it should be submitted to the HSC Board.

Response submitted by: \_\_\_\_\_ (Name & contact details of person submitting response) on behalf of \_\_\_\_\_ HSC Trust. Date: \_\_\_\_\_