

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



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**

MÁNNYSTRIE O

**Poustie, Resydènter Heisin  
an Fowk Siccar**

## **SAFER PRACTICE CIRCULAR**

### **Subject:**

**Risk to patient safety of not using the H+C Number as the regional identifier for all patients and clients**

### **For action:**

SABS Liaison Officers:

- to acknowledge receipt by 3 April 2009
- to indicate action underway by 28 August 2009
- to confirm completion by 31 March 2010

### **For Action:**

Chief Executives, HSS Boards, for cascade to:

- *Directors of Nursing*
- *Directors of Social Care*
- *Directors of Public Health*
- *Directors of Primary Care*
- *Directors of Pharmacy*
- *CSCG leads*
- *Risk Managers*
- *Records Managers*
- *Data Protection Guardians*
- *Information Governance leads*

Chief Executives, HSC Trusts, for cascade to:

- *Medical Directors*
- *Directors of Nursing*
- *Directors of Pharmacy*
- *Directors of Mental Health*
- *Directors of Social Care*
- *Directors of Family and Child Care*
- *Heads of Laboratories*
- *Medical Records Managers*
- *Systems Managers*
- *Data Protection Guardians*
- *Information Governance leads*

General Medical Practitioners – for cascade to:

- *Practice staff including Practice Managers, Specialist Nurses and Sessional Doctors*

Director, Business Services Organisation

### **For Information to:**

- *Chief Executive designate, HSC Board*
- *Chief Executive designate, PHA*
- *Director of Public Health designate, PHA*
- *Chief Executive designate, BSO*
- *Chief Executive RQIA*
- *Chief Executive European Centre for Connected Health*
- *Director, Safety Forum*

### **Summary of Contents:**

The purpose of this Circular is to highlight best practice in relation to the use of the H+C Number as a regional identifier

**Circular Reference: S&Q Learning Communication 05/09**

**Date of Issue: 30 March 2009**

### **Related documents**

HSC (SQSD) 16/2008: Standardising wristbands improves patient safety

HSS (F) 59/2008: Statement on Internal Control (SIC)- Assurance on Information Risks

### **Superseded documents**

N/A

### **Status of Contents:**

Best Practice Guidance

### **Implementation:**

Ongoing

### **Enquiries:**

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

Safety & Quality Unit  
DHSSPS  
Room D2.4  
Castle Buildings  
Stormont  
BELFAST  
BT4 3SQ

**Tel: 028 9052 2239**

[elaine.lawson@dhsspsni.gov.uk](mailto:elaine.lawson@dhsspsni.gov.uk)

Dear colleagues

## **Risk to patient safety of not using the H+C Number as the regional identifier for all patients and clients**

The NPSA has recently highlighted the risk to patient safety of not using the NHS number as the national identifier for all patients. Reports to the NPSA about incidents arising from reliance on local hospital numbering systems demonstrate that there is real danger to patients of serious harm or death.

With the introduction of the Health+Care Number (HCN) in Northern Ireland, similar patient/client safety considerations apply. The Directorate of Information Systems (DIS) has advised that information taken from the PAS and SOS CARE systems show that whilst on average approximately 83% of current patients/clients have been allocated a HCN; the remaining 17% have not. In addition, "confused records" (where one HCN is being used by two or more patients/clients) continue to be identified. Timely corrective action is not being taken on these and other irregularities identified on regular reports from DIS, nor are they being followed through on all affected information systems.

Therefore, in order to ensure safer practice in acute, community and social care settings, general medical services and regional screening services the following action should be taken by HSC organisations and practitioners:

1. Use the HCN as the regional patient/ client identifier; **OR alternatively**, the HCN as the regional patient/client identifier in conjunction with a local hospital numbering system (i.e. **where local hospital numbers are used they must be used alongside and not instead of the HCN**).
2. Use the HCN (and its barcoded equivalent) in/on all correspondence, notes, patient/client wristbands and patient/client care systems to support accuracy in identifying patients/clients and linking records.
3. Put processes in place to ensure that patients/clients identify themselves in a consistent manner. DIS are currently developing further guidance on protocols to be used in this regard which will be issued for consultation later in 2009. In the meantime, as a minimum, patients/clients should be asked for their formal Forename(s)/Surname and their date of birth as it appears on their birth certificate.
4. Central Services Agency (CSA) will continue to issue medical record cards as a means of informing patients about their HCN and encouraging them to use it where appropriate.

The Department issued a related circular *HSC (SQSD) 16/2008 Standardising wristbands improves patient safety* in February 2008 which recommended the following core identifiers on wristbands:

- last name;
- first name;
- date of birth; and
- HCN (if this is not immediately available continue to use your local identifier number and add HCN when it is available).

It is recognised that significant elements of the standardising wristbands best practice cannot be accomplished until the next regional tendering exercise is initiated. The timescales set out in this circular therefore relates solely to the use of the HCN.

In addition, the Department issued circular *HSS (F) 59/2008 Statement on Internal Control (SIC)- Assurance on Information Risks* in October 2008 which specifically requires that from 2008/09 assurance is to be provided on how risks to information are being managed and controlled as part of the risk management process. Adherence to this best practice guidance will assist HSC organisations to meet that requirement.

We would ask you to bring the content of this document to the attention of relevant practitioners 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 8.3 (h) and (i) (effective records management and protection of information); and
- Criterion 5.3.3(f) (implementation of evidence-based practice through guidance, for example, NPSA guidance).

#### **HSC Trusts Action:**

HSC Trusts should take immediate action to implement this safer practice. By:

- 28 August 2009, complete a review of current procedures and draw up an action plan to address the issues identified in paragraphs (1) to (4) above and, in particular, to ensure that all retrospective and future DIS feedback reports are addressed; and
- 31 March 2010, ***all action should be completed.***

Trusts should provide assurance on this action to the new HSC Board via the Safety Alert and Broadcast System and copy to the Department.

#### **HSS Boards (HSC Board from 1 April) , Regional Screening Services and General Medical Practices Action:**

HSS Boards (HSC Board from 1 April), Regional Screening Services and General Medical Practices should take immediate action to implement this safer practice notice. By:

- 28 August 2009 to advise that action is underway to address paragraphs (1) to (4) above; and
- 31 March 2010 ***all action should be completed.***

The HSC Board should provide assurance on this action via the Safety Alert and Broadcast System to the Department.

Dedicated DIS staff are available to provide advice and support to all relevant staff where needed. Contact details are as follows and should be directed through one Trust nominated person:

**HSC Trusts:**

<u>Belfast HSC Trust</u>	<u>Gordon Cleland</u>	<a href="mailto:gordon.cleland@dis.n-i.nhs.uk">gordon.cleland@dis.n-i.nhs.uk</a>
<u>Northern HSC Trust</u>	<u>Dave Savage</u>	<a href="mailto:dave.savage@dis.n-i.nhs.uk">dave.savage@dis.n-i.nhs.uk</a>
<u>South Eastern HSC Trust</u>	<u>Nuala Magee</u>	<a href="mailto:nuala.magee@dis.n-i.nhs.uk">nuala.magee@dis.n-i.nhs.uk</a>
<u>Southern HSC Trust</u>	<u>Nuala Magee</u>	<a href="mailto:nuala.magee@dis.n-i.nhs.uk">nuala.magee@dis.n-i.nhs.uk</a>
<u>Western HSC Trust</u>	<u>Stephen Kearney</u>	<a href="mailto:stephen.kearney@dis.n-i.nhs.uk">stephen.kearney@dis.n-i.nhs.uk</a>

**HSS Boards (HSC Board from 1 April), regional screening services and general medical practitioners:**

<u>General Practitioners</u>	<u>Brian Conway</u>	<a href="mailto:brian.conway@dis.n-i.nhs.uk">brian.conway@dis.n-i.nhs.uk</a>
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Yours sincerely



**Dr J F Livingstone**  
**Director, Safety, Quality & Standards**



**Mr B McKeown**  
**Acting Director, Directorate of Information Systems**