



# Urology Services Inquiry

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29 November 2021

Dear *Parent / Family Member,*

I am writing to you as Chair of the Urology Services Inquiry as I understand that you and/or your family have been affected by the treatment received while a patient of the Southern Health and Social Care Trust's Urology service. I am writing to you to tell you a little about the Inquiry and our work and to ask you to help if you feel you can.

The Minister for Health has asked the Inquiry to look at a number of matters. Those matters are set out in the document known as our Terms of Reference which is attached hereto and which can also be found on the Inquiry's website together with other material which may be of interest to you:

[www.urologyservicesinquiry.org.uk](http://www.urologyservicesinquiry.org.uk).

As can be seen, Part (d) of the Terms of Reference tasks me with making sure that those patients or immediate families who have been affected by the care received in the Trust's urology department have an opportunity to tell the Inquiry about their experiences.

I do need to be absolutely clear that the Inquiry cannot make any decision on whether anyone should be held liable for things that may have gone wrong; it is for the courts to determine civil and criminal liability. If our investigations do disclose matters that need to be looked at by other bodies we may refer those matters to them for further investigation. You may be aware that aspects of Mr O'Brien's clinical practice are being investigated by the General Medical Council (GMC) and the Inquiry cannot encroach on the GMC's remit.

This Inquiry is primarily examining issues relating to systems and governance which are relevant to the treatment and safety of patients. At the end of our work, the report to the Minister will have to make recommendations about things that we hope will make a difference to improving patient safety. To achieve this objective, and in order to make meaningful

recommendations, it will be important that the Inquiry hears from as many patients and/or families affected as possible.

In order to facilitate those who want to tell the Inquiry about their experiences, we have devised a questionnaire that you are invited to complete. It is available on the Inquiry website and can be downloaded, or, if you prefer we can send it out to you in the post or by email. You can get a copy of it by telephoning: **02890 251005** and giving us your name and address.

If you want to give the Inquiry a written statement, rather than completing the questionnaire, then we can arrange for you to do that too. Depending on what you tell us in answer to the questionnaire or in your statement, we may wish to hear from you in person, and if so, we will invite you to a hearing at the Inquiry. It is unlikely that we will want to hear from everyone who fills in a questionnaire or who makes a written statement, so if you do not receive an invitation do not worry, we will still take into account what you have told us.

You do not need a lawyer to engage with the Inquiry, but you are of course free to consult your own legal representative should you wish. If you feel that you require their help in filling out the questionnaire or to make a statement and cannot afford a lawyer, then I will make it possible for your lawyer to apply to the Inquiry to seek an award to help pay for that assistance.

I recognise that engagement with the Inquiry may be distressing. If you do feel able to help us with our work, we will treat you and your family sensitively throughout the process.

I want to reassure you that it is not compulsory for anyone to tell us about what has happened to them or their loved one, and I will not compel anyone who would prefer not to do so. We will not broadcast those hearings relating to patients or allow patient or family names or private details to be made public. Any material that is published on the Inquiry website will be anonymised and redacted to ensure that you cannot be identified, unless you consent to us identifying you. There will be a limited need to disclose some personal details to those whom I have decided will be core participants in the Inquiry.

Any material that we receive from you or other bodies will be treated confidentially by the Inquiry and I will ensure that anyone outside the Inquiry who needs to see material, for example, medical records, gives an undertaking to treat it confidentially.

The Inquiry is trying to find out what happened, why things happened as they did and what could be done to make things better for patients in future.

I do hope that you will feel able to help us with our work.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine A. Smith". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Christine" and last name "Smith" clearly legible.

**Christine A Smith QC**

Chair to the Urology Services Inquiry