

13 August 2021

Our ref: FOI/25190

Lyndsay Eccleston

Email: [request-778399-fdac7ab2@whatdotheyknow.com](mailto:request-778399-fdac7ab2@whatdotheyknow.com)

Dear Ms Eccleston

**RE: Blood Patch Patient Review**

I refer to your Freedom of Information (FOI) request received 30 July 2021.  
Please find below Trust response.

**(1) It now transpires that there were patients who were a part of cohorts 1 + 2 included in this review. Can you, therefore, confirm why these 66 were selected?**

RESPONSE: The information which was collated for the structured judgment review of 66 patients was conducted at a point in time. The review identified 66 patients who had one or more blood patches but had not attended the neurology recall.

**(2) How many of the 66 patients are deceased?**

RESPONSE: From the information which is currently held it has identified that there are less than five patients who are deceased.

We are unable to provide an exact figure - exempt from release under section 40(2) of the FOI Act - as this could make patients personally identifiable. Disclosure would constitute a breach of the principles of the General Data Protection Regulations 2018.

**(3) How does this review differ from the 2016/2017 internal review of 200 blood patch patients?**

RESPONSE: The recent review of the 66 patients which was undertaken using a structured judgement review template. This particular template was not available to use in 2017.

**(4) How many had blood patches were performed by a neurologist other than Dr. Michael Watt?**

RESPONSE: 34 patients had a blood patch provided by a consultant other than Dr Michael Watt between April 2009 to 31 March 2021.

**(5) Why would you exclude the remaining blood patch patients?**

RESPONSE: The purpose of the Structured judgment review was for patients who had an epidural blood patch but were not recalled. The outcome of the structured judgment review which was completed for each individual patient has been shared with the patient.

**(6) Why did the Belfast Trust head this investigation, given the obvious conflict of interest, and what steps did you take to make sure that this was independent? Did you exclude consultants who were a party to the initial blood patch concerns and investigations?**

RESPONSE: The structured judgement review was completed by one Locum Consultant Neurologist. This Locum Consultant Neurologist was employed by the Belfast Trust and has provided an independent assessment. The Locum Consultant Neurologist was not known to Dr Watt. As a quality assurance, the Belfast Trust asked the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) to review one third of the structured judgment review reports. The RCP draft interim report has concluded that this desktop review was done robustly and effectively.

**(7) Why were patients included in this review, excluded from giving their accounts of what happened? This is particularly important as you have already acknowledged concerns with note-taking and record-keeping of blood patch patients.**

RESPONSE: All patients who attended the neurology recall had the opportunity to discuss their care and treatment as a former patient of Dr Watt. The Belfast Trust is not aware of any patient who has been excluded from giving an account of their experience. This was evident by the number of calls to the Neurology Advice Line. Many other patients have chosen other ways of sharing their experience. Any patient who wishes to discuss their care should make contact with the Neurology Advice Line and ask to speak to Mrs Clare Lundy, Neurosciences Service Manager. The Neurology Advice Line number is 0800 980 1100. This advice line is open from 9am to 5pm Monday to Friday, excluding weekends.

If you are dissatisfied with how this request has been handled, you can seek a review within the Trust in the first instance. You should write to: Public Liaison Service, Belfast Health & Social Care Trust, Nore Villa, Knockbracken Health Care Park, Saintfield Road, Belfast BT8 8BH or alternatively e-mail: [publicliaison@belfasttrust.hscni.net](mailto:publicliaison@belfasttrust.hscni.net) within two months of the date of this response and your complaint will be considered and a response provided usually within 20 working days of receipt.

Should you still be dissatisfied with the outcome, you can proceed to the second review stage by contacting the Information Commissioner, The Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, SK9 5AF who will undertake an independent review. It is important to note that if you refer any matter to the Information Commissioner, you will need to show evidence of having gone through the Trust's review process to try to resolve the matter with the Trust in the first instance.

If you have any queries regarding this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

**Clark Turner**  
**Public Liaison Services Officer**