

THE MORECAMBE BAY INVESTIGATION

Chaired by Dr Bill Kirkup CBE

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Dear Ms Porter,

MORECAMBE BAY INVESTIGATION

Dr Kirkup has asked me to thank you for your letter of 2 June and to respond on his behalf.

As you are aware from the interview protocol, those invited to share their experiences are described as interviewees.

Interviewees are being advised that they are welcome to bring a relative, friend or a colleague with them and that person will be permitted to remain in the interview room with them. The families of those affected are also permitted to attend interviews and the Investigation has not stipulated the degree of family proximity required to permit their attendance.

Whilst some families may wish to attend certain interviews, the members of some families affected by the events at the Trust have advised the Chairman that they do not wish to attend the interviews. They hope that this may enable Dr Kirkup and his Panel of expert advisors to have the most constructive dialogue possible with all interviewees and reduce potential additional distress for them. The Chairman has therefore advised the families that, should they wish to nominate a representative to attend in their place, he will consider their proposal. To date no names have been suggested.

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Independent investigation into the management, delivery and outcomes of care provided by the Maternity and Neonatal services of University Hospitals of Morecambe Bay Trust from January 2004 – June 2013

As the Morecambe Bay Investigation is an independent investigation and not a public inquiry, the Investigation was not established with any legal powers it can exercise. It cannot therefore place restrictions regarding confidentiality on any family member(s) or on interviewees, or the relatives, friends or colleagues who accompanies an interviewee. However prior to each interview commencing, the Chairman reminds everyone who attends of the need for confidentiality and seeks their cooperation to support him and his Panel of expert advisors to fully address the Investigation's terms of reference by allowing them to do their job and enabling them to gain and maintain the confidence of all interviewees. The Chairman asks everybody attending to hand over mobile telephones, laptop computers, tablets and recording devices to ensure that interviews are not recorded and shared outside the Investigation. He hopes that by doing this he can assure interviewees that their evidence and information will be placed in context with other evidence submitted to the Investigation. He also explains that it avoids any misunderstanding or misrepresentation of information that is forthcoming in the interviews.

The Chairman's concern about material being reviewed in isolation and not being viewed in its entirety by the Investigation Panel extends to any manuscript notes that attendees may make. He requests that these are kept to a minimum to ensure that there is no risk that they are misplaced and misconstrued if read in isolation.

A brief summary of each interview is placed on the Investigation website and I trust the Royal Colleges of Midwives and Nursing are aware how interviews are being reported by the Investigation.

You enquire whether arrangements have been considered to deal with any interviewee who may become anxious when speaking in front of a family member whose presence may, in the interviewee's opinion, undermine the quality of their evidence. The Investigation Chairman will adjourn an interview at any point should he consider it appropriate to do so and review the arrangements in place. Additionally the Investigation hopes that nursing, midwifery and clinical interviewees will be reassured by the inclusion in the protocol of a section on how the Panel will hear evidence regarding personal sensitive data. Should that arise, all observers will be required to leave the interview room.

You will know that the names of all interviewees are being placed on the Investigation website.

A number of individuals have now been contacted and invited to attend an interview. In the invitation letter the Investigation explains that if they are required to review any material prior to their attendance, advance notice of this will be given to allow time for this to be arranged.

The Investigation hopes that the supplementary information that is being provided to interviewees and potential interviewees with their initial invitation letter will help allay concerns about the work of the Investigation. If, during the course of an interview, the Panel become aware that any evidence they hear is self-incriminatory the interviewee will be advised at the time.

Dr Kirkup hopes that this detailed response will be helpful to colleagues in the Royal Colleges of Midwives and Nursing and enable them to respond to queries about the Morecambe Bay Investigation that arise from their members. He does not consider that a meeting is necessary. Separately I have been in correspondence with a colleague at the Royal College of Nursing in the North West Regional office. The Chairman is encouraged that interviewees and potential interviewees have several sources of support should they attend for an interview.

Should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

OONAGH McINTOSH
SECRETARY TO THE INVESTIGATION