

FORENSIC PATHOLOGY SPECIALIST GROUP

Notes of the meeting held at 11:00am on Friday 20 May 2011 at the Home Office, London

Present:

Harry Millward-Sadler	(Chair)
Jeff Adams	Home Office
Caroline Browne	Human Tissue Authority
Nat Cary	BAFM
Jack Crane	Department of Justice Northern Ireland
James Grieve	Scottish Executive
Anne Harrison	NPIA
Paul Johnson	RCPATH
Colin Kettley	NPIA
Charlie Wilson	BAFM
Kenny Chigbo	Home Office (Secretary)

Apologies

Martin Bottomley	ACPO
Linda Cockburn	COPFS
Nigel Meadows	Coroners Society
Trevor Rothwell	Consultant

Introductions

1.1 Harry Millward-Sadler welcomed all to the meeting.

Apologies

2.1 Apologies were received from Martin Bottomley, Linda Cockburn, Nigel Meadows and Trevor Rothwell.

2.2 The FPSG was informed that Trevor's mobility problems meant that he would find it difficult to attend future meetings. Harry Millward-Sadler noted the importance of Trevor's input and stated he would continue to be involved in the work of the Group. It was suggested that future meeting could be via teleconference with Trevor. Kenny agreed to explore this possibility.

Action: Kenny Chigbo

Minutes of the last meeting 4 February 2011

3.1 With a couple of minor amendments, the minutes of the meeting held on 4 February 2011 were agreed.

Matters arising

4.1 Closure of Forensic Science Service, Sheffield Practice: The exact position is still not clear. Neighbouring group practices are providing forensic pathology cover. Staffing cover to cope with the increased workload was seen as a potential issue. There was a need for discussions with pathology departments in the local hospitals to explore links and interfaces. It was agreed that the changes provided an opportunity to take a fresh look at the way forensic pathology services were provided.

4.2 The NPIA is looking at all the administrative issues. Colin Kettley agreed to make the Pathology Delivery Board aware of the issues raised above.

Action: Colin Kettley

4.3 Certificate for Completion of Training (CCT): The Department of Health in Scotland had rejected the application for a CCT for neuropathology. Paediatric and forensic pathology could also be rejected. The Department will be asked to review this decision. Support from the Home Office and the NPIA may be needed in seeking a review of the decision. The FPSG was very concerned about the adverse consequences of failure to obtain a CCT for forensic pathology but was in general support of the proposed approach.

4.4 Other actions from the last meeting were either cleared or were agenda items.

Code of Practice

5.1 Jeff Adams reported that all the issues raised on the last draft of the C of P have been addressed. The next step is to ask the Royal College of Pathologists (RCPATH) to commence the consultation process by next week.

Action: Jeff Adams

Audit

6.1 The cases sent for audit are being analysed and the results should be available by the next meeting. Members of the audit subgroup were asked to send in any outstanding invoices.

6.2 The Chair suggested the need to start thinking of the next audit and setting it in motion. The FPSG agreed and said it was important to provide feedback on the audit at the next BAFM conference in June. The audit subgroup would meet before the BAFM conference and come up with ideas for the next audit. The subgroup was informed that the procurement exercise for paying for the audit required a specification to be written based on the audit topic.

6.3 It was necessary for the entire forensic pathology profession to take ownership of the audit. The Chair gave his full support to the proposals.

External Quality Assessment (EQA)

7.1 There is no regular system of external quality assessment designed for forensic pathology. The Chair asked the FPSG to advance the concept for such a scheme and asked Jack Crane to lead on this. Jack Crane agreed and stated that it was an important process that would help practitioners to revalidate and that he was keen to make the scheme as simple as possible. Nat Cary suggested the assessment could be web-based and could be linked to the BAFM website, but would need a dedicated person supporting it. It was suggested that capital funding for the scheme could come from BAFM with revenue funding coming jointly from the NPIA, Forensic Science Regulator and individual practitioners. It was noted that any agreement on finances would have to be determined once a model had been developed. Nat Cary agreed to put these proposals to BAFM.

Action: Nat Cary

7.2 Jack Crane agreed to draft proposals on the operation of the scheme for the FPSG, to be submitted to the GMC, Forensic Science Regulator and the NPIA.

Action: Jack Crane

Murder Investigation Manual (Pathology Chapter)

8.1 Anne Harrison reported that under the Government's reducing bureaucracy agenda, the number of manuals used by the police was being rationalised. The rewrite of the Murder Investigation Manual has been put on hold as a result of this rationalisation. The FPSG will be updated when further information is available on the rationalisation exercise and what it means for the Murder Investigation Manual.

Time of death

9.1 Jeff Adams informed the FPSG that the CPS has highlighted to the Regulator that one of the published versions of one of the nomograms used to determine the time of death was not accurate. He needed to advise the CPS about any possible impact of the use of the nomogram and what steps should be taken to remedy the impact.

9.2 The discussion noted the level of uncertainty which was inherent in the use of time of death estimates based on the cooling of the body. The uncertainty was increased by (a) the assumptions made in the use of the models and (b) the errors (in a scientific sense) in the measurements which were used in the models.

9.3 The consensus was that time of death estimates (based on the cooling of the body) are not reliable and when used, this should be done with caveats.

9.4 It was agreed that all forensic pathologists should be asked whether they have given an opinion on the time of death which has been critical to the case,

without caveats. The Criminal Cases Review Commission and Scottish Criminal Cases Review Commission should also be involved. It should also be noted that police surgeons are also involved in establishing the time of death. Jeff Adams agreed to inform the Regulator of the views of the FPSG, inform the CPS about the Group's next steps, and address the concerns raised about the accuracy of the time of death estimates in the Code of Practice.

Action: Jeff Adams

Any other business

10.1 The Chair had been informed that membership tenure of the FPSG was not defined but that Paul Johnson's term of 3 years representing the RCPATH was coming to an end. It was for members and the organisations they represent to either be re-nominated for a further term or for the organisation to nominate a new member. Nonetheless it was also important that there was some continuity of membership. The Chair agreed to write to RCPATH and the organisations represented in the FPSG.

Action: Harry Millward-Sadler

10.2 The Group was informed that the mortuary standards document has been drafted. Discussions were being held with the owners of the copyright of the documents mentioned in the draft.

10.3 Colin Kettley gave an update on an NPIA project in which 25 police forces provided information on body organs they hold, which were taken either under PACE or pre-PACE. ACPO are also undertaking work on guidance for the retention of body organs.

10.4 The Chair reported that he and Jeff Adams have been invited by the Forensic Science Regulator to attend a meeting with coroners. There are concerns about autopsy standards in non-forensic cases. The FPSG agreed that the Regulator should help if asked by the MoJ, but autopsy standards for non-forensic pathologists are not within the Regulator's or the FPSG's remit.

Date of next meeting

11.1 The next meeting will be held on 15 August 2011 from 11am at Conference Room 3b, Home Office, 2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 4DF