



Royal College of
General Practitioners

**Dr Jonathan Leach MB ChB MSc(Med) FRCGP DRCOG DIMC RCS(Ed)
Joint Honorary Secretary**

Assistant Coroner Peter Sigeo
The West Annexe
Town Hall
Sankey Street
Warrington
Cheshire
WA1 1UH

20 November 2019

Dear Mr Sigeo,

Re: The late Sam Spooner

Thank you for your letter of 11 November 19 asking for a response by the Royal College of General Practitioners, following the passing of Mr Sam Spooner. Please pass on our condolences to the friends and family of Mr Spooner. I am responding as Joint Honorary Secretary to Council.

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) is the largest membership organisation in the United Kingdom solely for GPs. It aims to encourage and maintain the highest standards of general medical practice and to act as the 'voice' of GPs on issues concerned with education; training; research; and clinical standards. Founded in 1952, the RCGP has just over 53,000 members who are committed to improving patient care, developing their own skills and promoting general practice as a discipline.

I was saddened to read of the circumstances of Mr Spooner's passing; that he had a history of mental health difficulties, suicidal ideation and that concerns had been raised to his general practitioner regarding the active risk of suicide. However, from your letter, I am unclear what actions the GP took and in particular whether the GP assessed the patient and, in most circumstances, made an urgent same day referral to the local psychiatric services for care and treatment following receipt of information from the counsellor on 30 September 2018. The backdrop of a previous attempt to take his own life on 26 August 2018 in conjunction with active suicidal ideation would place Mr Spooner as high risk on 30 September 2018.

The assessment and treatment of patients with mental health difficulties is a core component of being a GP. RCGP has published a detailed curriculum for general practitioners nationally and it is used both to assess doctors aspiring to work as a general practitioner as well as the standards against which we are viewed as qualified GPs. Within this, there is a detailed section on the Care of People with Mental Health Problems. <https://www.rcgp.org.uk/training-exams/training/gp-curriculum-overview/online-curriculum-2018/managing-complex-care/3-10-mental-health-problems/3-10-knowledge-and-skills.aspx> Key components in this regard are the requirements to:

- Be able to assess and manage risk/suicidal ideation
- Be able to co-create and implement an immediate safety plan with a suicidal patient
- Understand how to access local health and social care organisations, both statutory and third sector, that are an essential component of managing people with mental health problems

These elements of competence are assessed via the licensing examination, Membership of the Royal College of General Practitioners. In addition to the above, RCGP produces educational material such as a specific learning module on suicide prevention, which is available via our website. This two-module course:

This hour-long course consists of two modules. The first sets the scene on the problem of death by suicide. The interplay of numerous factors culminating in suicidal behaviour is discussed in order to highlight the various opportunities to intervene. The strategies of the home nations are explained including some examples of projects which lead the way in suicide prevention.

The second module takes a case-based approach focusing on the practical aspects of suicide prevention. The scenario is set in primary care and includes useful strategies and resources for the mitigation of suicide.

To compliment the above course, we have published guidance to general practitioners on the assessment, immediate management and onward referral for patients with suicidal ideation. This is via a detailed “toolkit” and for ease of reference I have enclosed “Suicide Prevention Top Ten Tips” leaflet which gives general guidance in this area.

Additionally, RCGP regularly inputs into national organisations looking to improve the responsiveness and understanding of mental health services. For example, I have personally attended and input into the All Party Parliamentary Group on Suicide and Self Harm. We also regularly support NHS England and devolved nations health authorities in the development of improved care, frequently alongside our sister Royal College, the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Work has included strategies to improve information sharing and case co-ordination as well as support for family members/carers.

From the above, RCGP already undertakes considerable work in this important area as we see it as a key priority. I will ensure that the sad case of Mr Spooner is brought to the attention of our mental health leads and our educational convenors so that we can continue to do what we can to improve services for patients such as Mr Spooner.

I trust that this is satisfactory and thank you for contacting RCGP.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J Leach', written in a cursive style.

Dr Jonathan Leach
Joint Honorary Secretary of Council
Royal College of General Practitioners