

Mr Philip Barlow
Assistant Coroner
London Inner South Coroner's Court
1 Tennis Street
London SE1 1YD

10 June 2021

By email

Dear Mr Barlow,

Coroner's Report to Prevent Future deaths: Regulation 28

Thank you for your email of 21 April 2021 and the attached Regulation 28 Report to prevent future deaths, in which you request a response from the British Thoracic Society (BTS) in relation to the details of actions that have been taken, or which are proposed to be taken, in relation to Concern 3: *The adverse effects of air pollution on health are not being sufficiently communicated to patients and their carers by medical and nursing professionals.*

Firstly, we would like to acknowledge that this Report was prepared as a result of the tragic death of a child. We would like to express our sadness for the loss of such a young life and send our condolences to Ella's mother and the wider family.

The death of 9-year old Ella is a grim reminder of the effects of air pollution and how serious the consequences of not tackling air pollution can be. While this tragic death was linked to asthma, air pollution affects people with many other respiratory diseases too, so this issue widely impacts our patients. We strongly support the Report's recommendation for the government to set legally binding targets for PM2.5 based on WHO guidelines to reduce the deleterious effects of air pollution in the UK.

We wish to assure you of the Society's commitment to contributing to the development of evidence-based guidance in this area, and to continuing to make available clear information for health care professionals to use in their interactions with patients and their carers.

In relation to the activities of the Society, I can provide the following summary of work to date and future plans.

Clinical guidelines

BTS is a multi-professional society which aims to improve the standards of care for those with respiratory disease and whose work influences and informs doctors, nurses and all the other professionals with whom these patients come into contact.

BTS, in partnership with the Scottish Intercollegiate Guideline Network (SIGN), has produced the British Guideline for the Management of Asthma over a number of years, the most recent edition being published in 2019.

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The 2019 edition of the BTS/SIGN Guideline states that *“Increased asthma symptoms in young children (mean age ≤9) have been linked, in observational studies, to exposure to air pollutants, including particulates, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide and ozone”* (para 6.2.4: <https://www.brit-thoracic.org.uk/quality-improvement/guidelines/asthma/>). BTS and SIGN are now working in partnership with the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) to produce a joint guideline on the management of asthma. Work will begin on the new joint guideline later in 2021, the scope of which will include reference to environmental factors including air pollution and with a planned publication date in 2023.

Information provision

BTS has included a focus on the effect of air pollution and other environmental and occupational factors on lung health in its comprehensive programme of scientific and clinical conferences and courses over a number of years. Most recent examples include:

- A keynote lecture by Professor [REDACTED] “The need for a new clean air act” at the 2017 Summer Meeting.
- Short courses for health care professionals in relation to Occupational and Environmental Lung Disease in 2018 and 2021.
- Regular scientific symposia and discussions at the annual BTS Winter Meeting including:
2018: Poster discussion session on Triggering and controlling asthma exacerbations
2019: The BTS Grand Challenge Lecture: Health Impacts of Air Pollution ([REDACTED], Munich)
2020: Discussion session: The evidence for and against low emission zones.

In addition, BTS provides regular scientific and clinical input to the development of information produced by NICE via the stakeholder consultation process, most notably in relation to guidance on indoor and outdoor air pollution.

It is of prime importance that health care professionals are aware of resources that can be used to inform patients and carers, and the BTS partner website “Respiratory Futures” provides signposting to [resources on air pollution and respiratory health](#).

The Taskforce for Lung Health, of which BTS is a member, explicitly highlights air quality as an issue for those living with lung disease: <https://www.blf.org.uk/taskforce/plan/prevention>

Future plans

BTS strongly supports the communication of the effects of air pollution by health care professionals to patients and carers. We intend to build upon the work undertaken to date in the following ways over the coming year:

- By continuing to raise awareness of the effects of poor air quality on lung health through the evidence-based guidance we produce, the conferences and short courses we run and the provision of expertise to stakeholders;
- Through the production of an updated Position Statement on air quality and lung health which builds upon the 2020 position statement which noted that:
Air pollution resulting from road transport, namely nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter, is of particularly urgent concern in relation to climate change and respiratory health.

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- By adding the health care profession voice to the debate on climate change and air pollution through our membership of the [UK Health Alliance on Climate Change](#) and through our continued involvement in the [Taskforce for Lung Health](#).

Finally, it is important to note that while health care professionals are able to provide advice to patients, their carers and in the case of children, parents, on actions that can be taken to mitigate against the effects of air pollution, they are not able to address the root cause of poor air quality.

The Society will do all it can to inform, educate and support respiratory health care professionals in this area, but we wish to emphasise that the risk of air pollution to public health will only be significantly reduced if government and other policy makers act in order to regulate pollution generating activity.

We wholeheartedly support the findings of the Coroner in this case and we hope that it will bring about action from the government on this issue.

Yours sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the sender.

Dr 
BTS Honorary Secretary