

Via email:-

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Alison Mutch OBE
HM Senior Coroner

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28 September 2021

Dear Ms Mutch

Re: Mr Stanislaw Wieslaw Zielinski - Regulation 28 Report to Prevent Future Deaths

Further to your letter, dated 24 August 2021, regarding the tragic case of Mr Stanislaw Wieslaw Zielinski please find my response outlined below.

The untimely death of a person is distressing for their family and any others affected by their death and loss, and all the more so if there is any belief that but for the actions of any organisation it could have been avoided.

I would like to record my sincere condolences to the family of Mr Zielinski for their loss, and I hope through this process they can obtain some closure.

The matters of concern raised in the Regulation 28 Report to Prevent Future Deaths were as follows:

1. Pre Covid Mr Zielinski would have been seen face to face rather than through a series of telephone consultations. The inquest heard that he and his family struggled to communicate with the GP to explain his deteriorating health position as a result of how his GP practice was delivering health care. The inquest heard evidence that as a consequence his deteriorating picture was not fully understood by his GP and he was additionally anxious as a result of an inability to express his concerns in person.
2. Mental health services were experiencing delays due to operating under the constraints of Covid and staffing issues. As a result there was a delay in offering him support, which would have assisted him. The inquest heard that the existing challenges pre Covid for mental health services had been exacerbated by Covid due to an increased need for their services in part as a result of the impact on mental health of isolation during lockdown.

Since the advent of the Covid-19 pandemic, general practice has been delivering health care services in line with the national General Practice in the Context of Coronavirus Standard Operating Procedure that has been regularly updated alongside British Medical Association (BMA) and Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP) guidance. This national guidance was in force at the time of Mr Zielinski's death.

The aim of this Standard Operating Procedure was to ensure general practice was able to provide health care to patients in a safe environment, limiting the opportunity of Covid-19 infections in staff and patients while reducing the number of absences either by infections or self-isolation.

As the pandemic developed and circumstances changed locally and nationally, the General Practice in the Context of Coronavirus Standard Operating Procedure evolved to state that general practice should be open for delivery of face to face care, whilst triaging patients remotely in advance where possible and using remote consultations where clinically appropriate.

Between January 2020 and July 2021 Tameside and Glossop general practices have delivered 1,803,362 appointments, this includes 1,038,069 (or 57.56%) face to face appointment and 728 649 (40.40%) telephone consultations.

In July 2021 there were 104,827 GP appointments in Tameside and Glossop – 62,717 (59.83%) were face to face, 40 156 (38.30%) were by telephone with 1828 (1.7%) home visits.

Pre-pandemic Tameside and Glossop GPs were seeing approximately 84% of patients face to face and approximately 12.5% patients via telephone appointments. This blended model of access is in line with previous RCGP guidance which suggests that approximately 50% of appointments in the 'new normal' could be digital. Recognition of individual practice patient demographics and patient engagement regarding a blended model is however essential. Tameside and Glossop general practices are seeing the same, or more, numbers of patients on a month as they were pre-pandemic through this blended approach.

In the latest national GP Patient Survey 80% of Tameside and Glossop respondents stated their experience of Tameside and Glossop practices was good or very good. This is close to the national average of 83%.

The current national guidance states that practices should still triage all patients, and while Covid-19 remains a risk, a balance is required to ensure the safety of staff in general practice, while ensuring that patients are still having consultations. This blended approach has seen more appointments in Tameside and Glossop taking place face to face than remotely.

Returning delivery of general practice to levels seen before the pandemic has been a gradual process involving responding to different waves of the pandemic as it has evolved and asking both patients and service providers to continually adapt. As part of this approach Tameside and Glossop CCG has undertaken two Building Back General Practice Surveys, which provided a snapshot of general practice delivery at July 2020 and April 2021. Following these surveys discussions were held with practices to ensure consistency of delivery of care across Tameside and Glossop.

However, regardless of these positive figures we are aware that this blended approach may not be appropriate for all patients and are greatly concerned about potential inequalities of access, including digital exclusion. Where clinically appropriate, patients will be seen face to face within general practice and to support those who may be digitally excluded we have established a digital wellbeing project that is providing those patients referred into it with hardware and training on how to access services online.

This work commenced with a general practice appointment booking survey in July 2021 to better understand how each individual practice manages its appointment booking system. It is at the discretion of each practice, outside of commissioners' direction, as to how they manage appointment booking. From this survey a best practice booking guidance has been created and was shared in August 2021 with all practices.

Work is also ongoing to understand negative patient experiences of primary care so that we can mitigate and reduce similar incidents going forward by sharing the learning across all general practices within Tameside and Glossop. This work involves reviewing appointment data on a

monthly basis in conjunction with any feedback from patients highlighting poor experiences. We then have conversations with practices regarding those poor experiences to support learning and improvement across all general practice within Tameside and Glossop. As such we encourage all patients to share their experiences – positive as well as negative – to reduce any inequality of access.

As part of the planned update to Locally Commissioned Services, delivered by general practice, and to further support practice reflection on whether each individual practice has the appropriate blend of face to face and telephone consultations for their individual patient lists, from 1 October 2021, practices will survey their patients and clinicians every six months to understand how both parties experience delivering primary care during the ongoing and evolving pandemic.

Tameside and Glossop CCG has been working to improve patient experience and access throughout the pandemic and will implement an action plan as part of this work that will also respond to the concerns raised by this Prevention of Future Deaths letter. Due to the nature of the available data this will be a rolling, ongoing action plan involving continual review of data and experiences. The action plan consists of the following:

1. Appointment booking survey in July 2021 and best practice guidance produced and shared with practices in August 2021
2. Review appointment data each month.
3. Review patient experience feedback each month
4. Individual conversations with practices with negative feedback after monthly reviews
5. Individual practice patient surveys every six months from October 2021
6. Individual practice clinician survey in October 2021
7. Sharing learning across Tameside and Glossop practices
8. Patient Experience Workshop with practice managers in October 2021 with the learning subsequently shared with Tameside and Glossop practices

Mr Zielinski self-referred to the Tameside and Glossop Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) Service and was triaged on 01 October 2020. He was subsequently sent an appointment letter on 15 October 2020 and offered a first appointment for 21 October 2020. The national timeframes for response for IAPT services are that 75% of all referrals commence treatment within 6 weeks and 95% within 18 weeks. While Mr Zielinski's referral and subsequent appointment were within the stated, and expected, national timeframes it is regretful that this did not meet Mr Zielinski's needs at the time. Tameside and Glossop CCG will work with the provider to ensure access times are optimised for all trying to access support during these challenging times.

The Covid-19 pandemic is constantly evolving and all health care settings are evolving with it, adapting to each changed circumstance to deliver health care services safely for both patients and those working within the health and social care system. Tameside and Glossop currently have high rates of covid transmission in the community and this needs to be taken into account in ensuring all health services are able to safely deliver care to patients. Tameside and Glossop CCG shall continue to develop and support safe ways of working alongside its providers, learning from all adverse events.

Nonetheless, whilst the CCG seeks to raise and maintain high standards it has no legal powers to determine how such consultations are undertaken. The contract with GPs – which is negotiated nationally and which the CCG isn't actually a party to – doesn't allow for specifying how consultations are delivered. At best the CCG can share data, share best practice and share any negative feedback with practices to understand why it has been received and encouraging changes that may want to consider to improve patient care and/or lived experience.

I hope that we have provided you with the necessary assurances in relation to your concerns and explained the legal framework within which we are operating.

Please contact me if you require any further information or if I can assist further in any way.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'S' followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.

Chief Executive, Tameside MBC/Accountable Officer, Tameside & Glossop CCG