

PORTSMOUTH
HealthCare
NHS
TRUST

Lieutenant C. R. S. Farthing,

Code A

Our ref

MM/BM/YJM

Your ref

Date

11th November, 1998

Ext

4378

Dear Lieutenant Commander Farthing,

I am writing further to my letters of 6th and 23rd October, 1998 now that I am finally in a position to respond to the matters you raised concerning your stepfather, the late Mr. A. D. B. Cunningham. I do apologise again for taking so long to respond but as Mrs. Frogley has explained to you the production of her report was delayed by staff annual leave and sickness.

I am aware that your concerns about the nursing home care and the Coroner's office are being investigated separately, and will be responding solely to those issues which relate to services provided by this Trust.

As you well know, Mr. Cunningham was admitted to Dryad Ward, Gosport War Memorial Hospital on 21st September, 1998 from the Dolphin Day Hospital which he had been attending since 14th September, 1998. Dr. Lord had been seeing him there, and had given both him and the nursing home advice on his care. On 21st September, 1998 she observed a serious deterioration in his condition and arranged for him to be admitted directly to the ward.

When you visited him later that day the Sister did speak to you about his condition as she was anxious to warn you that he was more seriously ill than might have been apparent to you. In fact, his condition deteriorated quite rapidly, and because he was in a lot of pain he was put onto a low dose of morphine, via a syringe driver, that evening.

PORTSMOUTH HEALTHCARE NHS TRUST CENTRAL OFFICE

St. James' Hospital

Locksway Road, Portsmouth, Hants PO4 8LD
Tel: 01705 822444 Fax: 01705 293437

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When you returned from London and visited again on 23rd September, 1998 you were obviously, and understandably, very shocked at the deterioration which had occurred. Your request for the syringe driver to be discontinued, so that you could hold final discussions with your stepfather, was carefully considered. I am sorry if you were given the impression that this decision would have to wait until a doctor next visited the ward as, in fact, the situation was fully discussed at the time by telephone with Dr. Lord, who took the view that the pain relief was of paramount importance, and, therefore, did not agree to your request.

When you next visited the ward on 24th September, 1998 you saw Dr. Barton, a local general practitioner who provides some medical cover for the War Memorial Hospital. She recalls the discussion, and confirms that both the acute pain from the pressure sores and the toxins generated from them were discussed, but she thought she had made it clear that Mr. Cunningham was developing a chest infection which would most probably be the cause of his death.

Dr. Barton was on annual leave between 25th September and 2nd October, 1998 and Dr. Brook, one of her partners from the general practitioner practice, was covering her duties in her absence. It was, therefore, absolutely appropriate for the death certificate to have been signed by Dr. Brook - she was acting as Dr. Barton's deputy, and she had seen your stepfather on the ward prior to his death.

It is a matter of regret that the pre-arranged meeting with Dr. Lord on 28th September, 1998 did not take place, although Dr. Lord understood the appointment to have been cancelled because you were going to be in London. She was aware that you cancelled the subsequent appointment but would have gladly made another appointment. I cannot account for the earlier confusion, but believe it would have been most helpful if you and Dr. Lord had been able to meet, as many of the concerns you have expressed might have been resolved at that time. Indeed, this may still be the case and I would be happy to arrange a meeting between you and Dr. Lord should you consider that might be helpful.

With regard to the problems you experienced with registering the death I am afraid there is little I can add, although I can confirm that the post-mortem was requested by Dr. Brook after she had discussed your concerns and your wish to change the certificate cause of death with Dr. Lord. You are already pursuing your concerns about the post-mortem with the Coroner's office, and I am afraid you will need to contact the surgery to clarify why you had such difficulties in contacting Dr. Brook. // wrong.

I would like to repeat how sorry I am that your distress at this time has been compounded by so many concerns, but hope that I have been able to clarify the position with regard to the Trust's role.

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If you would like to pursue any of these matters further, or would like to meet with Dr. Lord as suggested please contact my secretary within the next month so that we can make the necessary arrangements.

Yours sincerely,

Code A

Max Millett
Chief Executive