



COMMISSION FOR HEALTH IMPROVEMENT
COMISIWN GWELLA IECHYD

INVESTIGATIONS AND INQUIRIES

An overview

NOVEMBER 2000

INTRODUCTION

The Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) was set up by the government to improve the quality of patient care in the NHS across England and Wales. CHI started operating in 1 April 2000 and has a programme underway which aims to reduce unacceptable variations in care and ensure that every NHS patient receives a high level of care. The patient's experience is at the heart of CHI's work.

One of CHI's four statutory functions is to conduct investigations into serious service failures in the NHS. These failures may be a breakdown of processes and standards, a pattern of incidents which are of widespread public concern or other issues that remain unresolved through other reviews or investigations.

WHAT IS AN INVESTIGATION?

An investigation is an in-depth examination into the causes of service failure.

Investigations:

- ◆ involve patients, staff and stakeholders
- ◆ provide opportunities for staff to talk to the CHI team
- ◆ have teams which are multi-professional and include lay members

AIM OF AN INVESTIGATION

A CHI investigation aims to improve patient care and to make recommendations to restore public confidence in the NHS.

CHI will establish the cause of failures in the NHS by looking at individual as well as organisational practices. In an investigation, CHI will draw attention to areas that are failing and make recommendations to ensure that improvement is achieved. The investigators organisation's regional office in England or the National Assembly for Wales will ensure the recommendations are implemented.

CHI will publish a report on the investigation findings and recommendations, which will be made public and available on CHI's website.

REQUESTING AN INVESTIGATION

CHI investigates serious service failures in the NHS when requested by the Secretary of State for Health in England and the National Assembly for Wales and will carefully consider other requests. CHI can also decide to investigate where it thinks it has sufficient information for it to do so.

CHI does not investigate individual complaints. The appropriate professional regulatory bodies, individual organisation's complaints procedure, Community Health Councils and the Health Service Ombudsman exist to deal with such cases.

RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER INVESTIGATIVE BODIES

Investigations and inquiries are often conducted by other organisations within the health sector including the NHS Executive, the NHS Directorate in Wales and the General Medical Council. These procedures will continue to operate when there is a failure in health care.

CHI cannot address every instance of individual and organisational failure. In most cases, local investigative processes including those involving the NHS Executive, Regional Offices or the National Assembly for Wales will be completed before CHI is asked to conduct an investigation.

In time, CHI will set standards on how to undertake high quality investigations and inquiries.

DISCIPLINARY FUNCTIONS

CHI was not granted disciplinary functions in the Health Act of 1999. CHI does not have the powers to remove or replace any member of NHS staff, management teams or board members.

INVESTIGATION TEAMS

The Medical Director and the Director of Nursing of CHI are responsible for investigations. They provide leadership, advice and guidance to the investigation team.

The Investigation Manager is a full-time CHI employee experienced in investigation work. The manager supports their team throughout the investigation.

The investigation team members' skills and experience are matched to each investigation. A lay person will always be included on the team.

Apart from the Investigation Manager and lay person, investigation team members will usually work in the NHS.



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