

RS. 253399

16 August 2002

Our Ref: Comp/007/2002

Code A

Dear **Code A**

I am writing further to my letter to you of 21st May in respect of the complaint you have made regarding the treatment your late father received whilst at Gosport War Memorial Hospital.

Please accept my apologies for the delay in responding to you. Unfortunately, the investigation which was set up took rather longer to complete than initially anticipated. Further delays have been caused by staff annual leave and a number of competing priorities. I am sorry for any added distress this delay has caused.

In your letter of 18th April you list seventeen specific issues which I would like to go through one by one.

1. Sultan Ward has 24 primary care beds. To maximise the use of these beds, the ward admits patients from selected specialities nearing the end of an inpatient stay at Queen Alexandra/Saint Mary's or Haslar Hospitals. The ward also admits young chronic sick patients for planned respite care and patients requiring palliative or terminal care. In addition, the ward provides emergency respite care for patients who are unable to cope at home in the short term. The local GPs look after their own patients on this ward. Your father was admitted on 25th January 2002 by his GP, Dr Grocock.

Dr Grocock reports that he had visited your father at home on 24th January and had diagnosed bronchitis in association with viral symptoms. Your father had experienced 2 - 3 falls as his legs had felt weak. Prior to this on 22 January a diagnosis of viral illness had been made by the out of hours duty doctor service following a fall getting out of bed.

On 25th January, **Code A** had contacted Dr Grocock to say that **Code A** had fallen to the floor, that he had no apparent injuries but that she had had to call the ambulance service to lift him back on to his bed. **Code A** did not feel she could look after **Code A** at home and asked if he could be taken to hospital. Dr Grocock gave the option of Queen Alexandra Hospital or being admitted to Gosport War Memorial Hospital where he would be looked after by him and receive the nursing care that he needed. Arrangements were subsequently made for your father to be admitted to Gosport.

Dr Grocock considered that your father was a generally fit man, suffering from an acute illness from which full recovery was anticipated. His main requirements were for general nursing care and oral antibiotics. The investigating officer concluded that your father was admitted to the most appropriate hospital for his needs.

2. On admission to Sultan ward the admitting Staff Nurse undertook a full body/skin integrity check and found "some bruising in various stages of healing" on your father's trunk, arms, legs and feet. None of it was extensive or indicative of bony injury. There was no broken skin or lacerations and your father was not complaining of any pain. Following this examination, Dr Grocock arrived and also found no sign of injury. Consequently, in the absence of any apparent injuries no specific investigations were undertaken.
3. The entry in the records referring to a "Liver Disease Plan" is a grammatical error. It should read "Liver disease. Plan" (ie, this is what we will do). The doctor was Dr Sheila Lynch, one of Dr Grocock's partners, not a Healthcall doctor. All the investigations requested by Dr Lynch were completed on 28th January.
4. The investigating officer reports that according to the nursing care plans, your father received all necessary nursing care on the 29th, 30th and 31st January. Dr Grocock reports that at reassessment on 29th January no change to his management was indicated. Your father was still being treated for bronchitis. He was receiving antibiotics and physiotherapy, his temperature had fallen and he was not dehydrated. Your father was seen by Dr Lynch on 31st January when he complained of leg pain and was agitated, for which he was given resperidone.
5. **Code A** had a breakfast of cereal with milk, tea and orange juice before being put on "nil by mouth" for 6 hours. He returned to the ward at approximately 4.00pm. The staff interviewed have said that they were aware that your father was to resume food and fluids on his return to the ward although the "nil by mouth" sign had not been removed. Your father was given a supper of soup, an egg sandwich and ice cream. Although not entered on the fluid chart the nurses interviewed can recall that your father was given fluids. I can offer no reasonable explanation for the lack of documentation.
6. As previously stated, the nursing care plan indicates that your father received all necessary nursing care on 31st January. He was washed, changed and his bed changed twice after 4.00pm and was washed and changed again when you arrived at 8.05pm. I understand that on his return from x-ray your father was very agitated and did not want any covers on his legs or feet. This is a recognised side effect of jaundice affecting some patients whereby they cannot bear any pressure on their limbs, not even a blanket. The nurse on duty that evening folded a sheet across your father to try to preserve his dignity. I am sorry that you felt your father was uncared for.
7. There were no restrictions on the amount of fluids your father was allowed to have during his stay and staff report that they constantly encouraged him to drink. However, it is clear from the record that staff omitted to make a note of when fluids were offered and refused.
8. During his stay at Gosport War Memorial Hospital, your father was seen by two doctors, on four separate occasions and was not considered to be dehydrated until 1st February when it was obvious he had deteriorated. Blood tests taken on 28th did not indicate any significant abnormality and he had continued to drink and was eating, albeit light meals.
9. Your father was transferred to Queen Alexandra Hospital on 1st February when it was apparent that there had been deterioration in his condition. Dr Grocock has advised that you called him on 1st February to inform him that your father had deteriorated, that you had no confidence in the care that your father had received on Sultan ward and requesting that he be transferred to Queen Alexandra Hospital. On visiting your father Dr Grocock agreed that his condition had deteriorated since seeing him on 29th January and arranged for him to be transferred.

10. I can offer no reasonable explanation for the inaccuracy of some of the documentation surrounding your father's care. This standard is below that which we would expect and clearly not acceptable.
11. The nurses had communicated with one another regarding this as is clear from the fact that your father was given some supper. I apologise unreservedly for the fact that the sign was not removed at the appropriate time. This was an oversight.
- 12 & 14 Again, I can offer no reasonable explanation for the lack of documentation of your concerns regarding your father or the vomiting incident of 30th January. Documentation is central to good quality patient care and in this instance fell well below the standard we would expect. A great deal of work is currently underway in relation to improving the documentation skills of nurses at Gosport War Memorial Hospital. Specifically:
 - increased training for junior qualified staff in the planning of care
 - appointment of a senior nurse (for 6 months) to work with staff developing their documentation skills
 - the application of a set of national standards entitled Essence of Care, one of which specifically relates to documentation
13. The staff interviewed agreed that it would not be their practice to raise beds to prevent patients getting into them. The only explanation I can offer is that the ward had been cleaned and the bed had inadvertently been left in the raised position.
14. Once again, I have no reasonable explanation as to why the nursing documentation is not complete.
15. The staff interviewed have expressed concern that any comment they made may have been misconstrued. There was no intention to infer that your father was or possibly could have been infectious. Your father was being nursed on an open ward with no precautions which would not have been the case had there been concerns in respect of infection.
16. Gosport War Memorial Hospital only has a small laundry facility which is used for those patients who have no family or friends able to help in this respect. There is a private laundry facility available and information about this is provided next to the nurses' station. It is normal practice in all acute hospitals that patients are expected to make their own arrangements for personal laundry to be done.
17. I am sorry that you and your family have been left feeling this way. Every patient coming into hospital has the right to be treated with dignity and I am sorry that the care provided to your father at this time did not come up to the standards we would hope to provide. All the staff involved have been interviewed as part of this investigation and regret the distress you and your family are feeling.

In addition to these specific points, I thought it might be helpful to comment on other points you raise. You refer to your father's liver scan result as reading "very difficult scan". The investigating officer interviewed the x-ray staff and was advised that this meant that it was difficult to visualise the liver, for any number of reasons, the usual one being the size and shape of the patient's abdomen. Apart from the ascites the scan was NAD (nothing abnormal detected).

You refer to an incident on 31st January which I have previously discussed. However, you mention the unusual colour of your father's urine. I thought it might be helpful to explain that this colouring is choluria, a well-documented condition that occurs when a patient has an excess of

the bile pigment bilirubin in the blood. When the level of bilirubin in the blood rises, visible jaundice appears and the urine becomes very dark brown or orange.

I appreciate that this has been a very difficult time for you and your family and once again apologise that the care provided to your father was not always to the standard we would expect.

I hope this helps to explain some of the events which took place. I would like to thank you for drawing your concerns to my attention and to assure you that complaints are taken seriously. An action plan will be drawn up to address the issue of inadequate record keeping and documentation and the lessons learned from the complaint you have made will be disseminated throughout the Trust.

If there are issues about which you would like further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me. If it would be helpful to meet to discuss your complaint further I would be happy to do so.

Yours sincerely

Ian Piper
Chief Executive