

## EXPERT REVIEW OF RECORDS OF DECEASED PATIENTS OF DR WATT

### MINUTES OF PHASE THREE STEERING GROUP MEETING

#### Meeting 2 - Held on Friday 13 December 2024 at 09.00 Via MS Teams

|                       |                         |                                              |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------|
| <b>Members:</b>       | Dr Nazia Latif          | RQIA Authority Board                         |
|                       | Dr Ian Steele           | RQIA Medical Lead                            |
|                       | Mr Brian O'Hagan        | Ethical Advisor / PPI                        |
|                       | Mr Ray Martin           | Lay Representative                           |
|                       | Professor Stuart Elborn | RQIA Authority Board                         |
| <b>In Attendance:</b> | Mrs Briege Donaghy      | RQIA Chief Executive (Chair)                 |
|                       | Mrs Linda Rafferty      | Project Lead                                 |
|                       | Dr Leanne Morgan        | Clinical Lead                                |
|                       | Mr Malachy Finnegan     | Senior Communications Manager                |
|                       | Mr Sean Green           | Project Support Officer (taking minutes)     |
| <b>Apologies:</b>     | Mrs Lynn Long           | RQIA Director / SRO                          |
|                       | Mr Stewart Finn         | Director of MS Society / Vice Chair of NINCA |

#### 1.0 Welcome, Introductions and Apologies

Mrs Donaghy welcomed members to the meeting, noted above apologies, and invited introductions and a brief overview of professional backgrounds.

Mrs Donaghy advised members of the publication of Progress on Commitments made in RQIA's Report on the Expert Review of Records of Deceased Patients (Neurology), November 2022, which can be accessed by clicking [here](#)

#### 1.1 Declaration of Interests

No conflicts of interest declared. Declaration of interests will remain as a standing item on future agendas.

**Action:** Members who have yet to complete the Declaration of Interests form to submit via email to Mrs Rafferty, to ensure accurate record keeping.

#### 2.0 Minutes of the previous meeting of the Steering Group held on 11/09/2024 - for approval

Minutes were reviewed and agreed without amendment.

**Action:** Mrs Rafferty to liaise with the RQIA Communications team to arrange for the minutes to be published on the RQIA website.

#### 3.0 Update on progress

Mrs Rafferty provided the following updates on the progress of Phase Three work streams, and advised members that a highlight report would follow the meeting:

### Preparation of records for virtual review by the Expert Review Panel

- The digitisation of the 18 deceased patients' medical records, which required a significant period of work carried out at pace by a small team of agency staff, overseen by Mr Green, Project Support Officer, has been completed, and records returned to source organisations.
- The digitised records have been uploaded to RQIA's secure electronic platform, and the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) made aware of their availability for virtual review with effect from Friday 29 November 2024.

### RCP Deed of Indemnity / Timeframe for the Expert Review

- The RCP provided a Deed of Indemnity (DoI) which required sign-off by the Department of Health (DoH) prior to commencement of the review by the expert review panel. RQIA received the signed-off DoI dated today, 13 December 2024, which RQIA forwarded to RCP to enable the review of the records to commence.
- The RCP have advised they anticipate remaining on track to have the review of the records completed prior to multi-disciplinary team meetings taking place on the last week in January and first week in February 2025.
- Arrangements will then be made for individual families to meet, virtually, with the expert review team, should they wish to do so. This will be facilitated and supported by the Family Liaison Team (FLT). The meetings are expected to take place before the end of March 2025.

### Family Liaison Team Workshop re Future Approach to Family Engagement

- A FLT workshop has been arranged for 19 December 2024 to consider and plan next steps in terms of supporting families to prepare for individual meetings with the expert review team.
- All of the families participating in Phase Three have opted to record their family concerns for review by the expert panel. The majority of family concerns forms have been completed to date, with only two outstanding. The FLT continue to support the remaining two families to record their family concerns.

### Health Minister's Meeting with Phase Two Families

- The FLT issued a letter of invitation, on behalf of the DoH, to families who had participated in Phase Two of the expert review, to a meeting with the Health Minister and DoH officials on 29 October 2024 in Castle Buildings, Stormont. Briege Donaghy and Linda Rafferty, RQIA attended the meeting.
- During the meeting an update was provided in respect of the implementation of the 76 recommendations within the report of the Independent Neurology Inquiry (INI), through the INI Implementation Programme. The Minister advised that his Department remains committed to overseeing this significant work programme and to work in partnership with stakeholders to take forward each recommendation.
- The Phase Two families, including those who did not attend the meeting, have since been provided with a record of the meeting and a letter of thanks from the Minister. The letter confirms that DoH officials intend to provide quarterly progress updates on the INI Implementation Programme moving forward, which will be made available on the DoH INI Implementation Programme website.
- Whilst the DoH have since developed a mailing list for issuing further correspondence directly to those families who attended the meeting with the Minister, the FLT have continued to provide assistance by issuing further

correspondence, on behalf of the DoH, to those families who did not attend the meeting. These families have been asked if they would consent to having their contact details shared with DoH for future correspondence.

### Further Phase

Dr Morgan provided the following update:

- Twelve families have approached RQIA since the written ministerial statement on 03 July 2024; three of the families are out of scope in that their deceased relatives did not receive care from Dr Watt.
- The FLT have engaged with eight of the new families to date, all of whom have expressed an interest in participating in a further phase of the review. Arrangements will be made to engage with the remaining family in the new year, along with any additional families who come forward prior to the Ministers deadline of 31 December 2024.

### Communications

Mr Finnegan provided the following update:

- A flyer to raise public awareness of the Health Minister's deadline of 31 December 2024 for additional families to contact RQIA had been made available at the NICON conference in October and also published on the Neurology section of the RQIA website.
- On 28 November 2024, DoH issued a press release and information on social media regarding the deadline. The press release was also published on the Neurology section of the RQIA website; Patient and Client Council (PCC) have been including the information on their weekly newsletter and have re-tweeted/re-shared as appropriate. NI Neurological Charities Alliance (NINCA) have also taken steps to raise awareness in this regard.
- The RQIA Communications team will continue to work closely with the DoH press office on all matters relating to the Expert Review, and will continue to reinforce the DoH message on RQIA website.
- The DoH press office are to publish one final notification prior to the deadline of 31 December 2024 set by the Health Minister.

**Action:** Mr Finnegan to liaise with DoH press office with regard to publishing one final notification before the deadline of 31 December 2024.

## **4.0 Steering Group Terms of Reference - for approval**

Members discussed version two of the Terms of Reference (ToR), which had been amended to include reference to the lessons learned during Phase Two of the expert review. The group approved the revised document for publication, subject to the addition of a form of words to state that the Steering Group will reflect on learning from the process itself and any system learning identified, upon completion of Phase Three of the Expert Review.

**Action:** Mrs Rafferty to arrange an appropriate form of words for Mrs Donaghy's consideration and approval, prior to liaising with the RQIA Communications team to arrange publication of the final version of the ToR on the RQIA website. Copies of the final version to be issued to members for their information.

## 5.0 Ethical Framework for Phase Three of the Expert Review - for approval

Dr Morgan advised that the Ethical Framework had been updated in collaboration with Mr O'Hagan and Mr Martin and in consideration of Dr Latif's comments regarding the protection of human rights, fairness, and the language used to reflect this.

Members discussed and approved the amended Framework.

**Action:** Mrs Rafferty to liaise with the RQIA Communications team to arrange publication of the amended Ethical Framework on the RQIA website.

## 6.0 Key Risks

Mrs Rafferty advised that two risks are currently open on the Expert Review Risk Register:

1. There is a risk of damage to the reputation of the Expert Review and to RQIA, in the event of failure to meet the expectations of families who opted to engage with RQIA in relation to Phase Three of the Expert Review.
2. There is a risk of damage to the reputation of the Expert Review and to RQIA, due to the submission of a Pre-Action Proceeding Letter for Judicial Review, in respect of the Ministerial announcement on 3 July regarding DPR next steps and future approach.

Mrs Donaghy suggested removing risk 2 as it does not impact Phase Three of the Expert Review. All members in agreement.

Mrs Donaghy commented on the potential impact on a further phase of the review, should a large volume of families' approach RQIA prior to the Minister's deadline of 31 December 2024. Mrs Rafferty advised that this had been discussed by the Project Team and that the FLT are closely monitoring the number of new families coming forward, which has been relatively low to date. She further advised that the DoH are kept informed of numbers coming forward during regular joint DoH/RQIA update meetings.

All members content that the risk register now contains one item only.

**Action:** Mrs Rafferty to close risk 2.

## 7.0 Budget

Mrs Rafferty confirmed that the budget spend for Phase Three continues to be closely monitored. Mrs Donaghy commented that RQIA may need to seek an accrual of the funding for Phase Three, in the event of RCP's timeframe slipping.

## 8.0 Any Other Business

- 8.1** Mrs Donaghy asked how frequently Phase Three families spontaneously contact RQIA. Mrs Rafferty advised that spontaneous contact is infrequent, which may be a result of enhanced early engagement processes and the provision of regular written updates to families.

Mr O'Hagan advised that he had been asked to propose to the Steering Group the possibility of RQIA arranging peer-to-peer support for Phase Three families. He further

advised that families may build peer networks themselves, however RQIA could potentially offer to bring them together in the first instance. A discussion ensued during which potential benefits of such an arrangement were acknowledged.

Dr Morgan advised that this would require a careful, sensitive approach, and would benefit from the views of Professor Nichola Rooney, Consultant Clinical Psychologist in the first instance.

It was agreed to consider the proposal further, to include seeking the views of Professor Rooney, at the FLT workshop on 19 December 2024. The group agreed that the workshop should include consideration of managing family expectations regarding the impact potential findings and recommendations within the RCP Phase Three report and individual case summary reports could have on families.

- 8.2** Members discussed the appropriate title to use from this point on with respect to referring to Dr Watt, given he is no longer registered with the General Medical Council. Dr Latif commented that 'Michael' would be generally accepted in most contexts. Mrs Donaghy advised taking a consistent approach, and asked Mr Finnegan to link in with DoH to agree on a position.

**Action:** Mr Finnegan to link with colleagues at DoH to establish a position on referring to Michael Watt's title going forward.

## **9.0 Next meeting**

Next meeting to be held at the end of February/beginning of March, with the option of an extraordinary meeting in advance if required.

## **10.0 Thank you and close**

Mrs Donaghy thanked everyone for attending and for their valuable contribution to the meeting.