The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority

RQIA Provider Guidance 2025-2026

Independent Health Care

Hospice Adult

What we do

The Regulation and Quality Improvement Authority (RQIA) is the independent body that regulates and inspects the quality and availability of Northern Ireland's health and social care (HSC) services. We were established in 2005 under The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003 to drive improvements for everyone using health and social care services.

Through our programme of work, we provide assurance about the quality of care; challenge poor practice; promote improvement; safeguard the rights of service users; and inform the public through the publication of our reports. RQIA has four main areas of work:

- We register and inspect a wide range of independent and statutory health and social care services.
- We work to assure the quality of services provided by the Strategic Planning and Performance Group (SPPG), HSC trusts and agencies - through our programme of reviews.
- We undertake a range of responsibilities for people with mental ill health and those with a learning disability.
- We support establishments and service providers to improve the service they deliver.

All work undertaken by RQIA is focused on the following four domains:

- Is care safe?
- Is care effective?
- Is care compassionate?
- Is the service well led?

RQIA registers, inspects and supports a wide range of health and social care services. These include: nursing, residential care, and children's homes; domiciliary care agencies; day care settings/centres; independent hospitals; independent clinics; independent medical agencies; nursing agencies; residential family centres; adult placement agencies; voluntary adoption agencies, school boarding departments and young adult supported accommodation (inspected only).

The four domains

How we will inspect

We will inspect every adult hospice at least annually. Our multi-disciplinary team of inspectors will carry out an unannounced inspection, and from time to time our inspectors may also carry out other inspections in response to concerns that may be raised with us.

When we inspect an adult hospice we aim to provide assurances in respect of the standard, quality and safety of services delivered. We do this by:

- Seeking the views of the people who use the service, or their representatives.
- Talking to the management and other staff on the day of the inspection.
- Examining a range of records including care records, incidents, complaints and policies.
- Providing feedback on the day of the inspection to the manager on the outcome of the inspection.
- Providing a report of our inspection findings and outline any areas for quality improvement.

Our inspections are underpinned by:

- The Health and Personal Social Services (Quality, Improvement and Regulation) (Northern Ireland) Order 2003
- The Independent Health Care Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005
- The Regulation and Improvement Authority (Independent Health Care) (Fees and Frequency of Inspections) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2011
- The Regulation and Improvement Authority (Independent Health Care) (Fees and Frequency of Inspections) (Amendment) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2022
- The Department of Health (DOH) Minimum Care Standards for Healthcare Establishments July 2014

Provider guidance in respect of the maintenance and upkeep of the premises and the management of medicines are also available on our website and are currently under review. These documents should be reviewed to ensure compliance with the minimum standards and legislation.

Should you have additional categories of care, please ensure that you review and adhere to the relevant provider guidance document i.e. Private Doctor (PD).

What we look for when we inspect

To help us to report on whether the care is safe, effective, compassionate and well led, we will look for evidence against the following indicators.

Is care safe?

Avoiding and preventing harm to service users from the care, treatment and support that is intended to help them.

Indicator S1
There are, at all times, suitably qualified, competent and experienced persons working in the service in such numbers as are appropriate for the health and welfare of service users.

Examples of evidence

Staffing and volunteers

- There are sufficient numbers of staff in various roles to fulfil the needs of the hospice and patients.
- There are arrangements in place for maintaining a record of the shifts worked by each staff member to include a record of the hours worked by each person.
- There is an induction programme in place appropriate to the role.
- A system is in place to ensure staff receive annual appraisals and records are retained.
- A system is in place to ensure all staff receive appropriate training to fulfil the duties of their role, including professional body Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and RQIA training guidance.
- There are arrangements for monitoring the professional body registration status of all clinical staff, records should be retained for inspection.
- There are arrangements in place for monitoring the professional indemnity of all staff who require individual indemnity cover, records should be retained for inspection.
- There are arrangements in place to provide cover at all times by appropriately trained and experienced medical and health care practitioners.
- Evidence that each private doctor has confirmation of identity, current General Medical Council (GMC) registration, professional indemnity insurance, qualifications in line with service provided; evidence of ongoing professional development and continued medical education that meets the requirements of the Royal Colleges and GMC.
- Evidence that each private doctor has an appointed responsible officer (RO).
- Arrangements are in place to link into the wider system of RO's for doctors with practising privileges who work in other parts of the Northern Ireland (NI) healthcare system or in other healthcare systems beyond NI.
- Arrangements are in place to ensure that any newly appointed private doctor has notified their aligned RO of their new position.
- Evidence of arrangements for revalidation.
- Private doctors are aware of their responsibilities under GMC Good medical practice 2024 and 'Good practice in prescribing and managing medicines and devices'.
- Arrangements are in place to ensure the full appraisal document for each medical practitioner is reviewed and scrutinised by the registered person before granting or renewing practising privileges and a record retained.

Recruitment and selection

- Staff have been recruited in line with Regulation 19 (2) Schedule 2 of The Independent Health Care Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, as amended.
- There is a written policy and procedure for staff recruitment in keeping with Regulation 19 (2) Schedule 2 of The Independent Health Care Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005.
- Staff personnel files are in keeping with 19 (2) Schedule 2, as amended.
- All staff involved in Regulated Activity with adults or Regulated Activity with children must have their enhanced AccessNI disclosure checked against the barred list in keeping with AccessNI code of practice.
- Recruitment and selection records should be retained for three years from the date of last entry in keeping with Regulation 21 (3) Schedule 3 Part II.
- An up to date staff register should be maintained and retained in keeping with Regulation 21 (3) Schedule 3 Part II.

Indicator S2
The service promotes and makes proper provision for the welfare, care and protection of service users.

Examples of evidence

Safeguarding - Adult

- Policies and procedures are in line with the regional Adult Safeguarding Prevention and Protection in Partnership policy (July 2015) and Northern Ireland Adult Safeguarding Partnership operational handbook June 2017.
- The hospice has identified an adult safeguarding champion (if required).
- There is an identified safeguarding lead and staff are aware of who the safeguarding lead is.
- There are arrangements in place to embed into practice the regional adult safeguarding operational procedures.
- All staff receive the relevant level of training as outlined in RQIA training guidance.
- Staff should have training in keeping with the Northern Ireland Adult Safeguarding Partnership Training Strategy 2013 (revised 2016).
- Staff are knowledgeable about adult safeguarding and are aware of their obligations in relation to raising concerns.
- All suspected, alleged or actual incidents of abuse are fully and promptly referred to the relevant persons and agencies for investigation in accordance with procedures and legislation and written records must be retained.
- Where shortcomings are highlighted as a result of an investigation, learning arising should be assessed, implemented and quality assured.
- Staff are familiar with their responsibilities and know how to appropriately recognise poor practice and raise concerns.

Safeguarding - Children

- Policies and procedures are in line with the regional policy Co-operating to Safeguard Children and Young People in Northern Ireland, (Update November 2024) and Safeguarding Board for Northern Ireland (SBNI) Procedures Manual (November 2017).
- There is an identified safeguarding lead and staff are aware of who the safeguarding lead is.
- There are arrangements in place to embed into practice the regional procedures.
- All staff receive the relevant level of training as outlined in RQIA training guidance.
- Staff training should be in keeping with SBNI Child Safeguarding Learning and Development Strategy and Framework 2020 – 2023.
- Staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding children and are aware of their obligations in relation to raising concerns.

- All suspected, alleged or actual incidents of abuse are fully and promptly referred to the relevant persons and agencies for investigation in accordance with procedures and legislation and written records must be retained.
- Where shortcomings are highlighted as a result of an investigation, learning arising should be assessed, implemented and quality assured.
- Staff are familiar with their responsibilities and know how to appropriately recognise poor practice and raise concerns.

Specialist palliative care team

- The provision of specialist palliative care is in accordance with current best practice and national guidelines.
- The policies and procedures for specialist palliative care services promote safe practice by a multi-professional team.
- The multi-professional team includes staff with specialist palliative care expertise to ensure that the holistic care needs of patients and carers are met.
- Multi-professional team meetings are held at least weekly to review the management arrangements in place for ethical decision making and patient advocacy services where this is indicated and required.

Indicator S3
There are systems in place to ensure that unnecessary risks to the health, welfare or safety of service users are identified, managed and where possible eliminated.

Examples of evidence

Managing medical emergencies and Resuscitation

- Policies and procedures in relation to the management of medical emergencies and resuscitation are in place (to include a risk assessment, training arrangements, provision of equipment, emergency medication, checking procedures, how to summon help, incident documentation and staff debriefing).
- Emergency medicines and equipment are available in accordance with British National Formulary (BNF) and the Resuscitation Council (UK)
- A robust system is in place for checking expiry dates of medicines and equipment by an identified individual.
- Medicines required for resuscitation or other medical emergency are clearly defined and are regularly monitored. These medicines are readily accessible in suitable packaging and available for use at all times. Accessible records are maintained relating to the regular monitoring of medicines required for resuscitation or other medical emergencies.
- Resuscitation equipment is checked and restocked to ensure all equipment remains in working order and suitable for use at all times. Checks are carried out daily by a designated person and recorded.
- Management of resuscitation and medical emergencies is included in staff induction and update training is provided annually.
- Staff have knowledge and understanding of managing resuscitation and medical emergencies.
- All ‘do not attempt resuscitate decisions’ are documented by the most senior health care professional caring for the patients, with the reason and date for review in the patient’s clinical record. This information is provided to other relevant health professionals and is reviewed and documented by the planned review date or when there are any significant changes in the patient’s condition.

Infection prevention control and decontamination procedures

- The environment is clean and clutter free.
- Infection prevention and control (IPC) policies and procedures are in place in keeping with The Northern Ireland Regional Infection Prevention and Control Manual.
- Records of training, which meet professional body CPD and RQIA mandatory training recommendations, are retained.
- Staff have knowledge and understanding of IPC procedures in line with best practice.
- Staff have knowledge and understanding of the decontamination process.
- There are written guidelines for staff on making referrals for advice and support to infection control nurses, microbiology services and public health medical staff who have expertise in IPC.
- The risk of cross infection to patients, staff and visitors is minimised by single use equipment or decontamination of reusable medical devices and equipment in line with manufacturer's instructions and current best practice.
- There is information available for IPC for patients, representatives and staff.
- There is an annual infection control programme of audits in place.
- There are clear lines of accountability in relation to IPC and staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities.
- Staff should have knowledge and understanding and adhere to the most up to date DoH guidance.

Risk management

- There are risk management procedures in place.
- All risks in connection with the hospice, treatments and services are identified, assessed and managed.
- Arrangements are in place to provide evidence of appropriate review of risk assessments.
- Any findings/learning arising from risk assessments should be implemented and assured.
- An overarching cooperate risk register is in place which details the measures in place to mitigate and control identified risks.

Indicator S4

The premises and grounds are safe, well maintained and suitable for their stated purpose.

Examples of evidence

Environment

- The hospice is clean, clutter free, warm and pleasant.
- There are no obvious hazards to the health and safety of patients and staff.
- There are arrangements in place in relation to maintaining the environment (e.g. servicing of lift/gas/boiler/fire detection systems/fire-fighting equipment/fixed electrical wiring installation/ legionella risk assessment).
- Arrangements are in place to ensure that environmental risk assessments are reviewed on an annual basis.
- Any findings/learning arising from risk assessments should be implemented and assured.

Is care effective?

The right care, at the right time in the right place with the best outcome.

Indicator E1

The service responds appropriately to and meets the assessed needs of the people who use the service.

Examples of evidence

Clinical records

- Arrangements are in place for maintaining and updating clinical records.
- Record keeping is in accordance with legislation, standards and best practice guidance GMGR records management.
- A policy and procedure is available which includes the arrangements in respect of the creation, storage, recording, retention, and disposal of records, and data protection.
- Records are securely stored (electronic and hard copy).
- A freedom of information publication scheme is in place.
- The hospice is registered with the Information Commissioners Office (ICO).
- Staff displayed a good knowledge of effective records management.
- The hospice has arrangements in place to comply with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- A patient register in keeping with Schedule 3 Part II of the Independent Health Care Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005 is maintained and kept-up to date.

Care pathway

- The referral procedure includes information about the treatment and care provided by the hospice and how to access this.
- Patients receive an explanation of the assessments that will be carried out by different members of the care team.
- A holistic assessment of patient's care needs using validated tools is carried out in accordance with procedures and within agreed timescales. The results of the assessments are used to develop an individualised care plan ensuring that attention has been paid to key elements of end of life care including communication, review of interventions, symptom control, hydration and nutrition.
- All treatment and care is recorded in the patient's clinical record.
- The care plan and ongoing care needs are agreed with the patient and carer and communicated to the multidisciplinary care team.
- The care plan is reviewed with the patient and carer in keeping with their changing needs.

Indicator E2
There are arrangements in place to monitor, audit and review the effectiveness and quality of care delivered to service users at appropriate intervals.

Examples of evidence

- There is an open and transparent culture that facilitates the sharing of information.
- The patient and family are aware of who to contact if they want advice or have any issues/concerns.
- Staff meetings are held on a regular basis and minutes are retained.
- Staff can communicate effectively.
- Learning from complaints/incidents/near misses is effectively disseminated to staff, implemented and assured.

- Patients and their families receive all the necessary verbal and written information about the specialist palliative care services provided by the hospice. This is accessed in an alternative language or suitable format when required.
- There is a member of the multi-professional team identified as the principle contact for each patient.
- The care plan is reviewed with the patient in keeping with their changing needs.
- Information about carer services and how they may be accessed is easily accessible in a variety of formats and places.
- The patient is kept informed about any changes or deterioration in their condition.
- Information is provided to the patient about treatment and care.
- There is written information for patients that provides a clear explanation of any treatment provided and includes effects, side-effects, risks, complications and expected outcomes.
- There are meaningful detailed handover reports.
- Patients are aware of who to contact if they want advice or have any issues/concerns.

Indicator E3
There are robust systems in place to promote effective communication between service users, staff and other key stakeholders.

Examples of evidence

Discharge planning

- Discharge planning is agreed with the patient and carer in accordance with the discharge procedure.
- The discharge plan is co-ordinated with the services involved in the patient's ongoing care and treatment.
- The planned programme for discharge from the hospice provides the patient and carers with clear, accessible written information to include: the discharge arrangements, future management of care, liaison with community services and advice and support available.
- Written information on the patient's treatment and care is provided to their general practitioner, other professionals and services involved in the patient's ongoing treatment and care.

Is care compassionate?

Service users are treated with dignity and respect and should be fully involved in decisions affecting their treatment, care and support.

Indicator C1
There is a culture/ethos that supports the values of dignity and respect, independence, rights, equality and diversity, choice and consent of service users.

Examples of evidence

- Staff can demonstrate how confidentiality is maintained.
- Staff can demonstrate how consent is obtained.
- The patients are treated with dignity and respect.
- There is a suitable location for private consultation.
- There is a policy and procedure on maintaining confidentiality which is regularly assured.
- There is a written policy and procedure on obtaining informed consent in line with DoH guidance on consent treatment and care.

Indicator C2
Service users are listened to, valued and communicated with, in an appropriate manner.

Examples of evidence

Patient/family involvement

- There are arrangements in place to support patients and or their family /representatives to make informed decisions.
- There are arrangements for providing information in alternative formats/interpreter services, if required.
- Hospice care services are planned and developed with meaningful patient, family and carers involvement.

Bereavement care services

- The hospice offers bereavement care services and support to the patient's family and significant others in accordance with the statement of purpose.
- The patient/family and significant others are provided with written information about the range of bereavement services available and how to access these.
- There are written referral and assessment procedures for accessing bereavement services.
- Support is available from staff trained in the provision of bereavement support.

Breaking bad news

- Patients and relatives have bad news delivered by professionals who are well informed and in a manner that is sensitive and understanding of their needs.
- The patient's consent is obtained before information regarding their bad news is shared with others.
- The procedure for delivering bad news to patients, their families and other significant people is developed in accordance with guidance such as Breaking Bad News regional guidelines 2003.

- The outcome of breaking bad news to patients, the options discussed, and future treatment plans are recorded, and with the patient's consent shared with their general practitioners and relevant health professionals.

Indicator C3
There are systems in place to ensure that the views and opinions of service users, and or their representatives, are sought and taken into account in all matters affecting them.

Examples of evidence

- Patient consultation (patient satisfaction survey) about the standard and quality of care and environment is carried out at least on an annual basis.
- The results of the consultation are collated to provide a summary report.
- The summary report is made available to patients and a subsequent action plan is developed to inform and improve services.
- RQIA staff/patient questionnaire responses are reviewed and used to improve services.

Is the service well led?

Effective leadership, management and governance which create a culture focused on the needs and the experiences of service users in order to deliver safe, effective and compassionate care.

Indicator L1
There are management and governance systems in place to ensure the overall quality and safety of services provided.

Examples of evidence

Governance arrangements

- Where the entity operating the hospice is a corporate body or partnership or an individual owner who is not in day to day management of the establishment, in accordance with Regulation 26 of The Independent Health Care Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2005, arrangements are in place to ensure the registered person/nominated representative monitors the quality of services and undertakes an unannounced visit to the premises at least six monthly and produces a report of their findings (where appropriate).
- There are arrangements in place for policies and procedures to be reviewed at least every three years.
- Policies are centrally indexed, a date of implementation and planned review is recorded and they are retained in a manner which is easily accessible by staff.
- Arrangements are in place in relation to medical governance in accordance with the GMC guidance document Effective clinical governance for the medical profession: A handbook for organisations employing, contracting or overseeing the practice of doctors'.
- There are clear clinical governance structures in place.
- Arrangements are in place to provide evidence of an appropriate review of risk assessments e.g. legionella, fire, Control of Substances Hazardous to Health (COSHH).

Complaints

- The hospice has a complaints policy and procedure in accordance with the relevant legislation and DoH Guidance in relation to the Health and Social Care Complaints Procedure (Updated April 2023).

- The Model Complaints Handling Process (MCHP) due to be published on 1 July 2025 should be implemented from 1 January 2026
- There are clear arrangements for the management of complaints from patients.
- Records are kept of all complaints and these include details of all communications with complainants, investigation records, the result of any investigation, the outcome and the action taken.
- Staff know how to receive and deal with complaints.
- Arrangements are in place to audit complaints to identify trends and improve services provided.
- Themes emerging from complaints are analysed with input from the Medical Advisory Committee (MAC) and other relevant governance committees.

Statutory notification of incidents and deaths to RQIA

- The hospice has an incident policy and procedure in place which includes reporting arrangements to RQIA.
- Incidents are effectively documented and investigated in line with legislation.
- All relevant incidents are reported to RQIA and other relevant organisations in accordance with legislation and procedures RQIA Statutory Notification of Incidents and Deaths.
- Arrangements are in place to audit adverse incidents to identify trends and improve service provided.
- Themes emerging from incidents are analysed with input from the MAC and other relevant governance committees.

Equality

- The management have systems in place to consider equality for patients.

Indicator L2
There are management and governance systems in place that drive quality improvement.

Examples of evidence

Quality improvement

- There is evidence of a systematic approach to the review of available data and information, in order to make changes that improve quality, and add benefit to the organisation and patients.

Quality assurance

- Arrangements are in place for managing relevant alerts.
- Arrangements are in place for staff supervision and appraisal.
- There is collaborative working with external stakeholders.
- There are procedures to facilitate audit, including clinical audit (e.g. records, incidents, accidents, complaints).
- Results of audits are analysed and actions identified for improvement are embedded into practice.

Indicator L3
There is a clear organisational structure and all staff are aware of their roles, responsibility and accountability within the overall structure.

Examples of evidence

- There is a defined organisational and management structure that identifies the lines of accountability, specific roles and details responsibilities of all areas of the hospice.
- Staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities and actions to be taken should they have a concern.
- The registered person/s have understanding of their role and responsibilities as outlined in legislation.
- Patients/carers are aware of the roles of staff and who to speak with if they need advice or have issues/concerns.
- The registered person is kept informed regarding the day to day running of the hospice.
- There are opportunities to raise staff awareness through training and education regarding equality legislation to recognise and respond to patients' diverse needs.

Medical Advisory Committee (MAC)

- There are written terms of reference for the MAC.
- The MAC meets quarterly as a minimum, and arrangements are in place for extraordinary meetings, as necessary.
- The MAC reviews information collated by the registered manager on adverse clinical incidents (broken down by speciality, procedure and by clinical responsibility) on a quarterly basis to include:

    - All deaths
    - All unplanned re-admissions
    - Adverse incidents
    - All unplanned transfers to other hospitals or clinics
    - Other relevant clinical incidents
    - Complaints and compliments

- The MAC advises on corrective action when necessary.
- The MAC advises the service on developments in clinical practice.
- The MAC assists the senior management team to assure and evidence safe practice.
- The MAC provides the expertise to discuss and if necessary challenge practice of individual medical practitioners.
- Minutes of MAC meetings accurately reflect discussions progressed, actions agreed and persons responsible for taking forward actions within agreed timescales.

Practising privileges

- There is a written procedure that defines the process for application, granting, maintenance and withdrawal of practising privileges.
- There is a written agreement between the medical practitioner and the hospice that sets out the terms and conditions of granting practising privileges.
- Practicing privileges agreements are reviewed at least every two years

Indicator L4
The registered person/s operates the service in accordance with the regulatory framework.

Examples of evidence

- The statement of purpose and patient guide are kept under review, revised when necessary and updated.
- Insurance arrangements are in place for public and employer's liability.
- Registered person/s respond to regulatory matters (e.g. notifications, reports/QIPs, enforcement).
- Any changes in the registration status of the service are notified to RQIA.
- The RQIA certificate of registration is on display and reflective of services provided.
- The hospice is registered with RQIA and has the correct categories of registration in line with services provided and the legislation.

Indicator L5
There are effective working relationships with internal and external stakeholders.

Examples of evidence

- Arrangements are in place for staff to access their line manager.
- There are arrangements in place to support staff (e.g. staff meetings, appraisal and supervision).
- There are good working relationships and management are responsive to suggestions/concerns.
- There are arrangements in place to effectively address staff suggestions/concerns.
- The registered person /manager has arrangements in place for dealing with professional alert letters, managing identified lack of competency and poor performance for all staff including those with practicing privileges, and reporting incompetence in line with guidelines issued by DoH and professional regulatory bodies.
- There is a raising concerns/ whistleblowing policy and procedural guidance for staff.

Inspection reports

Our inspection reports will reflect the findings from the inspection. Where it is appropriate, a Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) will detail those areas requiring improvement to ensure the service is compliant with the relevant regulations and standards as a minimum. Where no areas of improvement are identified from the inspection this will be reflected in the report.

Once the inspection report is finalised and agreed as factually accurate, it will be made public on RQIA's website.

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