

HANDLING REPORTS OF SERVICE PROBLEMS POST BRISTOL

To: HQ Branch Heads and above
RO Directors and line managers

From: Graham Winyard

1. In the wake of the publicity over the problems at Bristol Royal Infirmary, some of you have already been approached with informal reports of poor performance by individual clinicians which may be putting patients at risk, on which local action is felt to be inadequate. This minute offers advice on how such reports should be handled.
2. One of the important lessons from Bristol and elsewhere is that anyone (and especially doctors) who has such concerns has a clear responsibility to ensure that appropriate action is taken. The GMC guidance in *Good Medical Practice* states :
 - "22. You must protect patients when you believe that a doctor's or other colleague's health, conduct or performance is a threat to them.
 23. Before taking action, you should do your best to find out the facts. Then, if necessary, you must follow your employer's procedures or tell an appropriate person from the employing authority, such as the director of public health, medical director, nursing director or chief executive, or an officer of your local medical committee, or a regulatory body. Your comments about colleagues must be honest. If you are not sure what to do, ask an experienced colleague or contact the GMC for advice. The safety of patients must come first at all times.

Simply notifying the Department of Health does not absolve people from taking local action within their own organisation, and they should be reminded of this. It may be helpful to refer them to the GMC guidance; and to make sure that they understand to whom they might speak. The attached CMO letter makes clear that all Trusts should have appropriate arrangements in place, led by the Medical Director.