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29 DEC 1999



Royal Brompton & Harefield NHS Trust

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Dr Ruth Chadwick
Bristol Royal Infirmary Inquiry
2-10 Temple Way
Bristol BS2 0BY

14 December '99

Dear Dr Chadwick

In your letter dated 9th December '99, you have asked me to comment on the clinical audit data contained in the annual reports from the Bristol Paediatric Cardiac Surgical Service between 1987-'90.

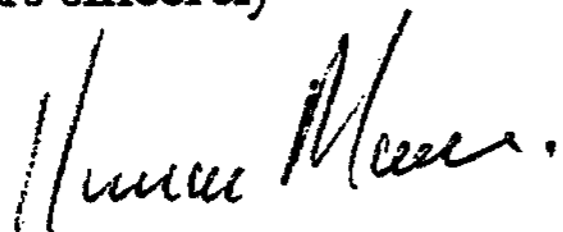
I have tried to review the Bristol annual reports and the results they present in the context of that era. My particular experience at that time was at the Royal Brompton Hospital, where coincidentally I have now returned to work. I am able to verify that the mortality at the Brompton Hospital for open cardiac surgery performed in children < 1 year of age in 1987 was approximately 13%, and the mortality for children > 1 year of age 3 %, based on a total of 77 cases < 1 year of age and 104 cases > 1 year of age. This data is extracted from the Paediatric Intensive Care Unit Admissions' book for that period.

The most striking feature of all three reports to me is the high mortality quoted for open heart surgery performed in children < 1 year of age. The mortality figures of 20% in 1987, 37.9% in 1988 and 37.5% in 1989 are consistently high and over the three year period showed no sign of improvement. There could be a number of explanations for this, including case-mix. I note, in particular, that as a percentage of total activity, proportionately fewer neonates were operated upon in Bristol than at the Brompton Hospital. This may go some way in explaining the high mortality in Bristol if there was a bias towards selecting the sicker patients for operation under one year of age. Also since the numbers operated were small, I presume, from a statistical point of view, the confidence limits were wide. Nevertheless I believe that the failure of the Bristol annual reports to demonstrate an improving mortality should have raised concerns and led to discussions within the unit about the reason for this, and any necessary remedial action, given that in the wider UK context (I note that the UK figures are appended to the 1989-'90 reports) mortality for open heart surgery under one year of age was approximately half of that reported in Bristol.

I hope that the comments I have made are useful to the Inquiry. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I could be of further assistance.

Best wishes

Yours sincerely



Duncan Macrae
Director, Paediatric Intensive Care Unit