

Neurology patient recall – phase 1

On 1 May 2018, Belfast Trust recalled more than 2,500 patients following an independent review of patient notes relating to the work of Consultant Neurologist Dr Michael Watt. The review was carried out by both Belfast Trust and the Royal College of Physicians. The consultant is not currently treating patients.

Here, you will find further information on the recall process, including latest figures, and you can [download a patient information leaflet](#). You will also find details of external sources of support.

If you have been recalled for a neurology consultation or are currently on the waiting list, you may have a number of questions about the appointment itself and what you need to do. [This document provides further information on:](#)

- recall appointments
- waiting lists for non-recall appointments
- who to contact with questions or complaints
- accessing your medical records
- what happens next
- other sources of support

Frequently asked questions

1. What is the background to this very significant recall of Neurology patients under the care of Consultant Dr Michael Watt?

A number of concerns in relation to a small number of patients were raised in late 2016 and early 2017 regarding the care and treatment provided by Neurology Consultant Dr Michael Watt.

This prompted a review process by the Belfast Trust which led to the Royal College of Physicians being asked in July 2017 to conduct a wider independent review of his practice. The Royal College of Physicians delivered its report in April 2018. Acting on its expert findings and recommendations, the Belfast Trust recalled some 2,500 patients who had been in Dr Watt's care prior to his cessation of active practice.

Restrictions had been imposed on the specific areas of his practice that were under review from December 2016, culminating in Dr Watt ceasing all patient care and treatment from the summer of 2017 both in the NHS and private sector.

2. What steps are being put in place to review and support patients?

Our over-riding priority is to ensure that all of the patients who had been on Dr Watt's list prior to his cessation of active practice are reviewed and supported during this anxious time for them.

Every patient, who has been recalled by the Belfast Trust, will be seen by a Consultant Neurologist.

At their hospital appointment, each patient will have their care reviewed to ensure that the diagnosis is correct, that appropriate investigations are completed, and that their ongoing care is appropriate. If any follow-up investigations are needed, these will be arranged and a follow up appointment with the patient will take place as soon as possible.

3. How many patients in total will be recalled?

Some 2,500 patients have been identified by Belfast Trust as requiring to be reviewed as part of the neurology recall. All of these patients have been written to.

Between 1 May and 25 July 2018, 2,211 people have been seen as part of the recall. In addition, a number of patients have either declined an appointment, cancelled, or didn't attend.

4. Has any harm been caused to patients?

These are people with a range of neurological conditions many of which are complex and debilitating.

To reassure patients, families and the wider HSC that every individual is on the correct care pathway, all identified patients will be reviewed.

It is important that we allow space and time for the clinical teams to undertake this work.

5. If initial concerns were raised at the end of 2016, why are you only recalling patients now?

The Independent Inquiry Panel set up will review all of the timelines and processes and we cannot pre-judge the outcome of this.

However, the decision to recall patients must always be evidence-based and founded on the likely benefit outweighing the anxiety a recall inevitably causes.

Recalling patients earlier would have meant acting in advance of the Royal College findings, potentially recalling a larger number of patients than required. It was important that sufficient facts were established before deciding a recall was appropriate and proportionate. The final report from the Royal College of Physicians was received on 26 April 2018. Patients were recalled on 1 May 2018.

6. How will the HSC review the wider issues and ensure lessons are learned?

A number of proactive steps have been taken. These include:

- The Department of Health have announced the establishment of an independent inquiry panel to review the recall of neurology patients by the Belfast Trust. The inquiry panel will be chaired by QC Brett Lockhart. The second panel member is Dr Hugo Mascie-Taylor, an internationally recognised expert, who will provide strong clinical leadership input to the inquiry's work.
- The inquiry will review the process initiated by the Belfast Trust in December 2016, in relation to concerns raised about the clinical practice of Dr Michael Watt.
- The panel will also assess whether any complaints or concerns relating to Dr Watt prior to December 2016 should have provided grounds for earlier intervention.
- The Department has asked RQIA to undertake a review of governance of outpatient services in the Belfast Trust with a particular focus on neurology services. The review will then be extended as part of its rolling programme of inspections to cover all five HSC Trusts in Northern Ireland.
- The Department has also asked the RQIA to commission a parallel piece of work to ensure that the records of all patients or former patients of Dr Watt who have died over the past ten years are subject to expert review.
- A regional co-ordination group, chaired by the HSCB and PHA, comprising of Trusts and private healthcare providers, has been established to ensure consistency in approach and to provide assurance to the Department of Health on the steps being taken to review and provide support to affected patients.

7. What is happening to those people currently on waiting list, are these appointments now delayed due to the recall of patients?

No outpatient appointment will be cancelled as a result of this review, as patients who are recalled will be seen in additional clinics. The neurology service is working extremely hard to put patients first.

8. How much is the recall process costing?

This recall is not about cost, it is about patients. Whilst there will be a cost associated we will not know the full extent until the recall has been completed and all necessary follow-up actions carried out.

9. What should affected patients and families do if they are concerned?

Anyone who is worried and who is seeking further support should phone the advice line on 0800 980 1100, and/or contact their GP or private healthcare provider (if appropriate). We would also ask all patients who received a letter to please call the appointments line to book an appointment if they haven't already done so.

Latest Department of Health press releases

26 July 2018: [Neurology patient recall update](#)

07 June 2018: [Neurology inquiry panel terms of reference published](#)

31 May 2018: [Neurology patient recall update](#)

External sources of support

The Dystonia Society

89 Albert Embankment, London, SE1 7TP

Office: 020 7793 3651

Helpline: 020 7793 3650

Helpline email: support@dystonia.org.uk

The MS Society

34 Annadale Avenue, Belfast, BT7 3JJ

Counselling service: 028 9080 2802

Email: nireception@mssociety.org.uk

Helpline: 0808 800 8000 – free from all UK landlines and mobiles. 9am-7pm Monday-Friday except bank holidays

Helpline email: helpline@mssociety.org.uk

MND Association

Helpline: 0808 802 6262

Helpline email: mndconnect@mndassociation.org

Website: www.mndassociation.org/getting-support/local-support/branches/northern-ireland-branch/

Headway The Brain Injury Association

C/O Regional Acquired Brain Injury Unit, Musgrave Park Hospital, Stockman's Lane, Belfast, BT9 7JB

Contact: 078 2690 9110

Contact email: johnny.turnbull@headway.org.uk

Nurse Led Confidential Helpline: 0808 800 2244

Helpline email: helpline@headway.org.uk

Epilepsy Action

Helpline: 0808 800 5050 – free from all UK landlines and mobiles. 8.30am-5.30pm Monday-Friday

Helpline email: helpline@epilepsy.org.uk (we aim to reply within 48 hours Monday-Friday)

UK text messages: 0753 741 0044 (we aim to reply to texts within 24 hours Monday-Friday)

Tweet [@epilepsyadvice](https://twitter.com/epilepsyadvice) with your question and we will tweet back Monday-Friday

Parkinson's UK Northern Ireland

Wellington Park Business Centre, 3 Wellington Park, Malone Road, Belfast, BT9 6DJ

Contact: 028 9092 3370

Email: hello@parkinsons.org.uk

Helpline: 0800 800 0303 Text relay: 18001 0808 800 0303

Helpline is a free and confidential service available Monday-Friday 9am-7pm and Saturday 10am-2pm (closed Sundays/bank holidays)

Website: www.parkinsons.org.uk/about-us/parkinsons-uk-northern-ireland

Parkinson's Local Advisors covering each of the health trusts can be contacted via our Service Manager Patricia Jordan on 0344 225 3682

Syringomyelia Arnold Chiari Association

4 Broughton Park, Belfast, BT6 0BD

Email: saca.info@yahoo.co.uk

Brainwaves NI (supporting those affected by a brain tumour)

26 Fairview Avenue, Whitehead, Co. Antrim, BT38 9NU

Office: 028 9335 3995

Email: K.ferguson@brainwaves-no.org