

Neurology recall

September 2022

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why are you recalling 19 further patients as of September 2022?

Belfast Trust has identified 19 former outpatients of Michael Watt who should have had their medication reviewed in April 2021 as part of the third Neurology Recall.

Each of these patients has now been invited to an appointment with a Consultant where their medication will be reviewed.

The third Neurology Recall involved the Trust reviewing the medication of former patients who had been seen and discharged by Michael Watt between 1996 and 2012 and who were taking prescribed medications for certain neurological conditions and who had not been reviewed by a Consultant Neurologist in the intervening years. The outcomes from the third recall were published in June 2022. Belfast Trust has subsequently identified 19 further people who should have been part of the third Recall in 2021. These patients were not identified previously due to an error on the Trust's Patient Administration System.

2. What is the background to the recall of neurology patients under the care of former Consultant Dr Michael Watt?

Concerns in relation to a small number of patients were raised in late 2016 and early 2017 regarding the care and treatment provided by former Consultant Neurologist Dr Michael Watt. This prompted a review process by Belfast Trust which led to the Royal College of Physicians being asked, in July 2017, to conduct a wider independent review of his 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 HSC and private sector.

The Royal College of Physicians delivered its independent report in April 2018. Acting on its expert findings and recommendations, the Belfast Trust recalled some 2,500 patients, between May and August 2018, who were still attending Dr Watt's clinics prior to his cessation of active practice (Cohort 1).

A number of patients who were under the care of Dr Watt in the private sector were also recalled. The Ulster Independent Clinic reviewed 82 patients and Hillsborough Private Clinic reviewed fewer than five patients.

[The outcomes of the recall of patients in Cohort 1 has been published by the Department of Health.](#)

In November 2018, following a review of case notes from recently discharged patients, a further 1,044 patients were recalled (Cohort 2). [The Department of Health has published the findings from this review here.](#)

In April 2021, Belfast Trust recalled 209 former patients of Dr Watt who were seen and discharged between 1996 – 2012 and who were taking certain prescribed medications for specific neurological conditions. Additionally, we asked GPs to review 495 people and so ensure they remained correctly on certain non-neurological long-term medications, like Aspirin, who were seen by Dr Watt between 1996 and 2012 at a neurology clinic and who have not been reviewed by a consultant neurologist in the intervening years. In total there were 509 patients were recalled as part of Cohort 3.

[The Department of Health has published the findings from this review here.](#)

The Regulation Quality and Improvement Authority (RQIA) is also conducting a review of patients or former patients of Dr Watt who have died over the past ten years to ensure their care was managed appropriately. This work is ongoing.

3. In total, how many people did you recall in total?

Since the first recall in May 2018, Belfast Trust has recalled 4162 people for review.

4. I remain a concerned patient/carer. Where can I get further information or support?

Anyone who is worried and who is seeking further support should phone the **Neurology Recall Patient Advice Line on 0800 980 1100**. The advice line is operational from 9am-5pm daily with the exception of weekends and bank / public holidays. An answerphone service will be available and you should receive a call back within 2 working days from a member of the team.

Alternatively, anyone who is seeking further support should contact their GP or private healthcare provider (if appropriate).

5. What about the progress of the Review of Neurology Services in Northern Ireland?

The Department of Health is leading on the Review of Neurology Services.

6. Has any harm been caused to patients?

We would like to apologise to every person who has been recalled by us. We know this whole process has been very painful and worrying for a lot of people, and for that we are sincerely sorry.

All the information available to us, including the recently published outcomes report tells us that that a certain number of people may have been put on incorrect medication, or will have been given an incorrect diagnosis. We sincerely regret all the hurt and pain caused over the last number of years and for the harm that has been undoubtedly been done.

The focus of the work to date has been to reassure patients, families and the wider HSC that every individual is on the correct care pathway and all individual patients are informed of the outcome of their review by the neurologists that see them.

7. What is being done about the redress scheme?

The Department of Health is leading on this. [You can read the update from the Minister here](#)

8. What is happening with Dr Watt?

Michael Watt is no longer employed by Belfast Trust. His name no longer appears on the GMC's Medical Register. This means he is no longer a doctor and unable to practice.

9. Have you an update on the Independent Neurology Inquiry?

The establishment of an Independent Panel-led Inquiry was announced by the Permanent Secretary of the Department of Health in May 2018. The Minister for Health, Robin Swann, converted the Independent Panel-led Inquiry to a Statutory Public Inquiry on 11 December 2020.

The Inquiry Panel will carry out an independent statutory inquiry of an inquisitorial nature.

More information can be found here www.neurologyinquiry.org.uk.

10. How will Health and Social Care review the wider issues and ensure lessons are learned?

There are clearly important wider questions which will need to be addressed both to fully understand and assess the impact of what has happened and also to ensure that we can have confidence in the safety of neurology services now and in the future.

Belfast Trust has made significant changes to strengthen our internal processes and controls to ensure something like this cannot happen again.

The Department of Health has previously directed the Regulation Quality and Improvement Authority (RQIA) to undertake a review of governance of outpatient services in Belfast Trust with a particular focus on neurology services. The review was then extended as part of its rolling programme of inspections to cover all HSC Trusts in NI.

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.

The Department of Health has also commissioned its own Review of Neurology Services in Northern Ireland and it has published an interim report. Once finalised, the full Report will set out a clear strategic direction for how Neurology services are delivered across Northern Ireland.

The Independent Neurology Inquiry is ongoing. The Belfast Trust will embrace the recommendations of the Inquiry team. More information can be found here www.neurologyinquiry.org.uk.