

Chairman: Dame Deirdre Hine DBE FFPHM FRCP

PRESS RELEASE

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C. diff Inquiry to hold Oral hearings.

The C.diff Public Inquiry into the deaths which occurred in Northern Health and Social Care Trust hospitals during an outbreak of C.diff infection is now approaching the fourth stage of its work which involves witnesses to the Inquiry appearing before the Inquiry Panel at Oral Hearings.

These hearings, to which the public and the media will have access, are scheduled to begin on Monday 4th October and expected to take approximately 14 days in October. The main Council Chamber at Antrim Civic Centre will operate as the Hearing Chamber, except on Thursdays when Antrim Borough Council meets.

To date almost 200 people have contributed to the Inquiry's work including bereaved families, former patients and their relatives, as well as Trust staff. So far over 70 people have provided witness statements and over 50 people are being invited to provide oral evidence to the Inquiry.

Experts have also been called to address key themes identified by the Inquiry Panel. These include: the law on death certification; C.diff infection; infection control practice; care of the dying; communication with patients and relatives; staff support in healthcare organisations and communications with the media.

The Inquiry Panel will continue to provide updates at significant stages of its work, through communications with participants, its web site and press information.

The Inquiry can be contacted by calling Kate McClements on 028 9051 7124

or email: inquiry@cdiffinquiry.org.

Ends

For further media information and media register please contact Maria McCann at McCann Public Relations on 028 9066 6322 or 07802 934246.

IMPORTANT Note to editors:

A briefing meeting is to be held for media representatives in advance of the opening of the Inquiry to ensure there is adequate access and facilities for media and to provide guidance on the Inquiry process. This meeting will take place on the Friday, 1st October 2010 between 10.00 am and 12.00 noon.

Please go through to the C.diff website and the media section to register your attendance at this meeting. If you have any queries please contact Maria McCann directly on 028 9066 6322 or 07802934246.

Background notes:

- Inquiry stages:

Stage 1: Awareness raising among those affected and the wider public of the opportunity to participate in the Inquiries work. (Mar 09-July 09).

Stage 2: Information gathering from patients and families affected by the outbreak, staff employed in the affected hospitals. Identification of areas that require close scrutiny by the Inquiry Panel. (April 09- January 10)

Stage 3: Gathering of formal written evidence. (Feb 10-July10)

Stage 4: Oral Hearings hearings. (To be held in October/ November)

Stage 5: Preparation and submission of Inquiry Report to DHSSPS Minister.

- The issues the Inquiry has been asked to address are firstly, to establish how many deaths occurred in Northern Health and Social Care Trust hospitals during the outbreak, for which *Clostridium difficile* was the underlying cause of death, or was a condition contributing to death. Secondly, what were the experiences of patients and others who were directly affected by the outbreak of *Clostridium difficile* infection that occurred in Northern Health and Social Care Trust hospitals between 16 June 2007 and 31 August 2008.

- The Hospitals involved during the outbreak, which took place between 16 June 2007 and 31 August 2008, were Antrim, Braid Valley, Mid Ulster, Moyle and Whiteabbey.
- At the time the C.diff infection levels were identified as an “outbreak” as the levels of infection had exceeded the normal baseline rates.
- It was initially envisaged that the Inquiry would require twelve months to complete all investigations. The number of responses to the Inquiry’s work and the subsequent requirement for legal support for those providing evidence to the Inquiry have dictated an extension of the time to coordinate legal services for contributors.