

PRESS RELEASE

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Oral hearings conclude in C. diff Inquiry.

The hearing of oral evidence by the C.diff Public Inquiry Panel finished today at Antrim's Civic Centre.

A total of 62 witnesses provided oral evidence to the Inquiry Panel since it began hearings at the beginning of October.

In closing the Oral Hearings phase of the Inquiry, Chairman, Dame Deirdre Hine said:

"I wish to thank all those who have given of their time, both in preparation for these hearings and in providing their evidence and to pay tribute to the courage and conviction of all the witnesses.

"I appreciate the efforts that have been involved and that for many, particularly those closely affected by the C.diff outbreak, that it has been a difficult undertaking. I am sorry that the Inquiry itself may have reopened stressful and distressing memories for them. On behalf of the Panel I offer our sincere condolences to the families of the bereaved".

"By listening to patients, relatives and staff affected by the outbreak and drawing on their experiences, we are now better placed to contribute to an understanding of the impact of hospital acquired infections and point to changes and improvements in which these can be lessened or ameliorated."

"The Panel are grateful for the important insights and information which these hearings have provided us with. The Panel will retire to consider all the evidence both oral and written before reaching our findings and making recommendations. "

During the hearings which lasted 14 days, the Inquiry Panel heard from patients, relatives of those who had died, nurses, doctors, domestic staff, and managers from the Northern Trust Hospitals affected by the C.diff outbreak. Experts were also called to address key themes identified by the Inquiry Panel. These included: 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.

Ends

For further media information please contact Maria McCann at McCann Public Relations on 028 9066 6322 or 07802 934246 email: maria@mccannpr.com

Notes to editors:

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 almost 100 people have provided written witness statements.

- 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.
- The Inquiry Panel is providing information on all evidence provided to it throughout the oral hearings on its web site www.cdifquiry.org.

The Inquiry can be contacted by calling Kate McClements on 028 9051 7124 or email: inquiry@cdifquiry.org.