

**From the Permanent Secretary  
and HSC Chief Executive**



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Date: 12 December 2019

Dear Professor Healy,

Your correspondence of 28 November 2019 refers relating to the death of Mr Stephen Neill.

You have suggested that my office received a copy of a letter you sent to Michelle O'Neill MLA and that this was not acted on. There is no record within the Department of any receipt of your original correspondence but a copy was forwarded on 25 November 2019.

As I indicated in my response to Michelle O'Neill, the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) regulates medicines for all of the UK and is the government agency with responsibility for ensuring that medicines and medical devices work and are acceptably safe.

Similarly, you will be fully aware that the safety of all medicines, including Sertraline and other SSRIs, is continuously monitored in a process known as pharmacovigilance which seeks to identify unrecognised adverse effects or changes in the patterns of adverse effects and inform action to support safer use.

The Department is guided by the advice of the MHRA and, at this time, it is my understanding that there are no plans to review the use of Sertraline or other SSRIs. I would, however, point out that Sertraline and other SSRIs are subject to ongoing pharmacovigilance and the MHRA collects data from all spontaneous reporting and provides interactive Drug Analysis Profiles (iDAPs) on their Yellow Card website <https://yellowcard.mhra.gov.uk/iDAP/>

Under the circumstances, you may wish to raise your concerns directly with the MHRA and I would suggest that the most appropriate contact would be Dr Sarah Branch,

Director of Vigilance and Risk Management of Medicines, MHRA, 10 South Colonnade, Canary Wharf, London, E14 4PU.

In Northern Ireland, the Department of Health has formal links with NICE whereby NICE clinical guidelines are locally reviewed for applicability to Northern Ireland and, where appropriate, are endorsed for implementation in Health and Social Care (HSC). This link ensures that Northern Ireland has access to up-to-date, independent, professional, evidence based guidance on the value of health care interventions. I can advise that the current NICE guideline on the treatment and management of depression in adults is currently being updated. Further information about the update can be requested by contacting NICE at [DepressionInAdultsUpdate@nice.org.uk](mailto:DepressionInAdultsUpdate@nice.org.uk). Similarly, you may wish to raise your concerns about NICE directly with Sir David Haslam.

Any issues you may wish to raise relating to Coroners can be raised directly with the Coroners or the Lord Chief Justice for Northern Ireland. Contact details are available here: <https://judiciaryni.uk/>

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'R Pengelly', is positioned below the text 'Yours sincerely'.

**RICHARD PENGELLY**