



SCOTTISH EXECUTIVE

Health Department

Dear Colleague

SURGICAL MORTALITY BY NAMED SURGEON

On Monday, ISD will release surgical mortality figures for named surgeons. I understand you have already received a copy of the data to be released.

This is likely to generate press interest, and your Board or your clinicians may be asked to comment. I would recommend a consistent approach across NHS Scotland to avoid creating precedents that may cause difficulties for other Boards or for individual surgeons.

If your surgeons are not aware of the release of this information, they need to be told. This is especially important if they have particularly high mortality rates. I recommend strongly that they be steered away from commenting directly to journalists. Even if they believe they have a strong story to tell, it may place colleagues in an uncomfortable position.

I would also recommend strongly that NHS Boards avoid discussing the performance of individual surgeons or getting caught up in the detail. If some individual surgeons are defended, it may well expose those who are not; explaining the case mix of some surgeons is likely to increase pressure to discuss the case mix of all surgeons. If competence issues arise, they should be addressed in the normal way.

I enclose a copy of a statement I intend to make on Monday, and you might want to simply refer journalists to that statement. Alternatively, you might want to issue your own general statement in support of Scotland's surgeons or surgeons in your own area.

If surgeons have questions about the completeness or accuracy of the data, they should discuss the matter within Boards or directly with ISD. Such questions should not be aired in public, however great the temptation.

From the Chief Medical Officer

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For action

Medical Directors, NHS Boards and NHS Operating Divisions. Chief Executives, NHS Boards and NHS Operating Divisions. Press Health (for further circulation to NHS Boards and NHS Operating Divisions Press Offices.

For information

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Finally, I would be grateful if you could pass on to your surgical teams my sincere appreciation of the work they carry out and assure them that I will do all that I can to support them.

Yours sincerely

DR HARRY BURNS