



Dear Colleague,

## ENHANCING COLLABORATION AND CO-OPERATION IN FORENSIC MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

### Background

On 5 September 2024, Scottish Government officials met with representatives from high, medium, and low-secure mental health services to address pressing capacity issues that directly impact patient access to care and treatment, particularly in medium-secure services.

Recent cases where individuals assessed for treatment have faced delays due to limited bed availability have highlighted the need for improved patient flow in forensic mental health inpatient services.

Several factors contribute to these capacity challenges, including the reliance on local and regional commissioning without national oversight, delayed discharges from low-security facilities, gaps in low-security provision, and the absence of high-secure services for females in Scotland.

We are committed to tackling these challenges. The State Hospital Board for Scotland is working on a sustainable solution for women's services at the State Hospital and is developing its plans. The Women's Forensic Services Planning Group is actively considering the needs of female patients requiring low-secure care. While these issues are complex and require time to resolve, immediate collaborative efforts are needed to ensure timely access to necessary mental health treatment for all individuals who need it.

### Collaboration as a key to success

We know that Health Boards and services already

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### Addresses

#### For action

Chief Executives, NHS Boards  
Medical Directors, NHS Boards

#### For information

Chief Executive Assistants, NHS  
Boards  
Mental Welfare Commission  
Forensic Network  
Dr Gavin Reid, PMO (Forensic  
Psychiatry), Mental Health Directorate  
Dr Callum MacCall, PMO (Forensic  
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### Enquiries to:

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collaborate, but the experience of individual service users shows that enhanced co-operation is essential. Your active involvement is crucial to improve patient experience and flow throughout the secure estate.

To that end, we have tasked the Forensic Network with bringing together Health Boards and forensic mental health services to develop a plan to resolve immediate issues hindering access to services. Areas for prompt attention include:

- Clarifying referral pathways and processes
- Streamlining assessments to reduce duplication
- Harmonising how services manage waiting lists
- Exploring regional agreements to enhance cohesion in service delivery
- Establishing effective dispute resolution and escalation processes for bed availability
- Improving information sharing during hospital admissions and transfers from prison

The Forensic Network will facilitate discussions to contribute to a report and action plan, which will be submitted to Scottish Government by 16 December. The proposed plan will outline actionable steps with proposed timelines.

This collaborative effort is essential to ensure that Health Boards and Scottish Ministers meet their legal obligations to individuals alongside ongoing work towards a unified governance structure. Given the issues highlighted above, we would ask that collaboration with the Forensic Network is prioritised.

### **Fostering collaboration for improved patient care – Forensic Governance Advisory Group**

The Minister for Social Care, Mental Wellbeing and Sport has tasked officials with working towards a **Forensic Mental Health Board for Scotland** to enhance the planning and governance of forensic mental health services. Greater collaboration and co-operation is now part of the journey towards transitioning from many services to a forensic mental health system. As we work through the complexities of developing this unified system, we are pleased to announce the formation of our Advisory Group, led by **Ms. Esther Robertson**, alongside **Dr. Ian Dewar** and **Mr. James Cannon**. A separate DL Letter on the Advisory Group, which provides a Q&A document, can be found [here](#).

The group will focus on developing a clear proposal for the board, identifying its core responsibilities, and considering interim solutions. It will engage widely with clinical professionals, stakeholders, and individuals with lived experience is paramount to ensure all voices are heard during this process. The Group will report within 6 months from the first meeting.

If you have any questions or want to contribute your insights, please email the Advisory Group at [forensicmentalhealthreformteam@gov.scot](mailto:forensicmentalhealthreformteam@gov.scot).

**Action:**

We are therefore asking Chief Executives, Medical Directors, and all staff involved in the provision of forensic mental health services, to come together in taking this work forward with the support of Forensic Network and the Forensic Governance Advisory Group.

Please cascade this information as appropriate within your organisation.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Gallagher', with a stylized flourish at the end.

**Stephen Gallagher**  
**Director for Mental Health**  
**Scottish Government, Mental Health Directorate**