

**SCOTTISH HOME AND HEALTH DEPARTMENT****St Andrew's House  
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*Please reply to The Secretary***Previous Circular****Cancelled/Amended**..... NHS 1976(GEN)80**Our Reference**

ANG/4/4 Pt II

**Date**

27 January 1982 SERVICES AGENCY

*Health Board Secretaries  
Secretary of the Common Services Agency*

Dear Sir

**LINEN SUPPLIES: CONTROL OF ARTICLES IN STOCK AND USE**

1. Requests for approval to write-off losses of linen have become more frequent in recent years and the cash value of these losses has been increasing, even allowing for inflation. The level of unexplained losses generally has been the subject of recent criticism by both the Exchequer & Audit Department and the Department's statutory auditors, who have expressed their concern that the control and security measures adopted in many hospitals are not sufficiently stringent and require to be tightened.
2. This Circular gives further guidance on the control of linen, and requests that Boards review their existing security arrangements over its control, whether in stock, in use, or in transit. It also withdraws the advice given in Paragraph 6 of NHS Circular No. 1976(GEN)80 dated 13 October 1976, which in many areas is in practice being taken to imply that a loss at a rate of less than 5% per annum of the current value of linen in use can be regarded as acceptable without further enquiry.
3. Boards should not regard any level of linen loss as being acceptable. All losses should be investigated, to the extent that such investigation is administratively and financially feasible and practicable in relation to the level of the losses. Boards should always satisfy themselves as to the reasons for the losses before applying their own delegated authority to write-off, taking simultaneously the appropriate remedial action for the future. In making requests to the Department for approval to write-off amounts above this delegated authority, Boards should now provide brief details of the examination they have undertaken and should indicate the measures adopted to prevent, as far as possible, such losses in the future.
4. There are a number of ways in which Boards can effect and maintain security of linen; many of these are set out in NHS Circular No. 1976(GEN)80. Boards are requested to review their existing procedures in the light of that Circular. The Department would however draw particular attention to the following aspects:-
- (i) The degree of control at local level should be carefully examined, both in relation to clean laundry in circulation whether in topping up store areas, wards, or hospital residences and in relation to used linen in, or awaiting, transit to the laundry, to confirm that it is satisfactory.

- (ii) Upon receipt of this Circular, Boards should consider in what way early steps could be taken to determine the amount of linen held and use that as a yardstick to control the level of linen in circulation, ie in hospital, District or Area.
- (iii) Continuous attention needs to be paid to the level of supplies held in the topping up storage areas, wards or surrounding areas and in hospital residences. The supplies held should be sufficient to meet regular and emergency needs. In the hospitals, every attempt should be made to secure that such linen is held either in full view of staff within working areas or, in older units, in locked cupboards so that the linen is not easily accessible to the general public. In the hospital residences, the appropriate member of staff with responsibility for the residence should carefully control the issue of linen, its transmission to the laundry, and its receipt in the residence.
- (iv) Staff at ward level should be reminded of the need to comply with the established proper laundry procedures in respect of used linen and to ensure that it is placed in the appropriate bags.
- (v) If linen requires to be left unattended overnight, or at weekends, consideration should be given to the security of the area used for the purpose.
- (vi) Once any types of linen which are being regularly lost have been identified the situation should be closely monitored and precautions taken to make these more secure, eg. by exercising greater control over their issue and movement through the system.
- (vii) The current security arrangements for linen in transit should be examined with a view to minimising losses between the users and the laundry; this should also apply to the reception/dispatch areas and at the laundry where secure storage areas should exist and regular checks be made.
- (viii) Special vigilance should be exercised in relation to linen requiring repair or condemnation. Instructions should be given to the supplies officers to limit the replacement of linen to articles which can be identified as having been properly condemned, losses duly written-off, and specially authorised issues.
- (ix) A proper condemnation record should be maintained in the Sewing Room and any replacement of linen should be reconciled with this record. There should be a record kept of additional issues of linen which require to be put into circulation as a result of, for example, new units opening. If no satisfactory explanation can be given for these additional issues of linen the value should be shown as a loss and any appreciable level of loss investigated.
- (x) Regular scrutiny of linen losses should be made by internal auditors of NHS Authorities and reported to Area/District Executive Groups.
- (xi) In their annual accounts, Health Boards should allocate linen losses to the following categories:-

- a. theft, fraud, arson or wilful damage;
- b. incidents of the service - fire
  - flood
  - accident
- c. Other causes

The Losses Form will be slightly amended to allow for inclusion of these categories under the present Furniture and Equipment category. Genuine stocktaking discrepancies in store (usually of an accounting nature) may continue to be recorded in Item 9 of the Losses Form. Remedial action should be taken to minimise losses, in particular those occurring through theft, etc. Spot checks should also be made to deter theft and fraud.

5. Boards are reminded that the Laundry Adviser of the CSA is available to provide suitable guidance.

6. It is appreciated that the Boards will have evolved their own security arrangements based on earlier Circulars and that these will no doubt include the suggestions made above, or similar measures. The Department regard it as important that a continuing review of the various local procedures is undertaken to minimise unnecessary linen losses and as a direct consequence, to effect sound financial control. This review, where it does not already take place, should be introduced as quickly as possible.

Yours faithfully

  
G J MURRAY