



Rotunda Hospital
DUBLIN

Dr Sam Coulter-Smith
Master

Founded in 1745

**Statement by Dr Sam Coulter-Smith,
Master, Rotunda Hospital**

**HSE Retained Organs Audit/Look-back Exercise and Carter Report
23rd July 2009**

The national HSE Retained Organs Audit and the Look-back Exercise and Carter Report highlight areas of concern about post mortem practices in the Rotunda Hospital between May 2000 and Dec 2007, and refer to organ retention related to post mortem examinations completed prior to May 2000.

The Reports were published by the HSE today, 23 July 2009, and made available on its website.

We, as a Hospital, accept the issues raised in the Reports, and their recommendations.

As the new Master of the Hospital, I accept responsibility, on behalf of the Hospital, for what has happened and will deal with the issues as presented.

I would like to apologise on behalf of the Rotunda Hospital and the Board to all those families who have been affected by the issue of organ retention. I want to acknowledge the very difficult and stressful situation in which these families have been placed. And I wish to say how sorry we are for any hurt and distress caused as a result of the issues outlined in the Carter Report.

We received a copy of the Carter Report from the HSE in April 2009. In preparing his report Mr Carter reviewed every post mortem examination carried out in the Rotunda from 2000 to the end of 2007. There were 667 of these, of which 189 related to continuing organ retention.

We have reviewed in detail every case identified in the Report as raising a concern. Some cases were designated for research and education, and we have also dealt with some cases by returning organs to parents since the audit was completed last year. There are now 138 post mortems carried out between 2000 –2007 that are affected. We are confident that we can provide an open and full response to all the parents in these 138 cases.



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Having considered advice from the HSE, and following discussion within the Rotunda Hospital including specialist ethical advice, we have decided to contact parents within this group whose contact details we know. The remaining parents in this group will be notified through national newspaper advertisements.

My personal letter to the parents affected in this group, which they should have received today, lets them know they are identified as being affected and how to contact us if they want further details. There is a dedicated phone number provided in the letter.

I have offered to arrange meetings for them with specialist members of our staff. Parents may wish to have an advocate with them for this meeting. The Rotunda will facilitate counselling for parents, using accredited counsellors, if they so wish.

We acknowledge and apologise for any distress receiving this letter may cause some parents but our primary aim is to be open and transparent in all these matters. We also recognise that some of those we have written to this week may prefer to have no further personal contact with the Hospital and we will fully respect this.

If parents have moved address since their last contact with the Rotunda, or for some other reason do not receive the letter, they may contact us on a special Rotunda helpline number we have set up, separate from the HSE national helpline that was announced today.

The Rotunda Enquiry Line is 1800 303 265. The number will be open:

Today, 23rd July, from 2pm to 11pm
Friday 24th, from 10am to 11pm
Saturday 25th July, from 10am to 6.30pm
Monday 27th to Friday 31st 10am to 6.30pm.

The helpline will be managed directly by the Rotunda staff.

If the Hospital does not receive any contact from these parents within 6 months, then we will proceed to respectfully bury the retained organs or tissue.



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HSE Retained Organs Audit

Part of the work of the HSE Retained Organs Audit was to enumerate organs currently retained by hospitals that dated from prior to 2000. Mr Carter also reported on the pre-2000 cases in the Rotunda.

In 2000 and 2003, the issue of Organ Retention was highlighted both in Ireland and the UK in particular. A National Helpline and other publicity allowed affected parents to contact hospitals to establish if organs were retained from their children, and to ascertain their wishes regarding respectful burial/cremation.

Some parents made contact with hospitals at the time, including the Rotunda, and their wishes were followed. The Madden Report in 2005 recommended that hospitals should not proactively contact parents concerning cases occurring prior to 2000.

Consequently, like some other hospitals dealing with babies and children, we have continued to retain organs/tissue from 271 cases, where parents did not contact us.

In line with the other hospitals that have continued to retain organs from before 2000, we want to offer these parents another opportunity to make contact with us on the Rotunda helpline and indicate their wishes at this time.

The Rotunda Enquiry Line 1800 303 265 is for those parents whose babies underwent a post mortem examination before 1 May 2000. It can also be used by anyone who has a concern and has not received a letter from us regarding post mortems since then.

If we have no correspondence and direction from these parents, all the retained organs and tissues will be respectfully buried by the Hospital in July 2010.

The Rotunda helpline number along with the details regarding parents affected will appear in national newspaper advertisements from the HSE and the Rotunda tomorrow and on our website – www.rotunda.ie.

I want to assure all parents that in reviewing all of these cases, we have initiated contact with all families where an issue was noted, but our helpline is available for anyone who wishes to confirm this and make enquiries about their own case.



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Management & Oversight

The Carter Report also made findings in relation to oversight and management of post mortem practice. The Hospital accepts that the criticisms of shortcomings are valid and we have already taken steps to address and rectify them.

The Hospital supported and fully cooperated with the Look Back Exercise commissioned by the HSE. Whilst the auditing for the Report was being conducted, action was taken by the Board and management early in 2008 to put in place new oversight systems. These are now under my direction and that of the current management team.

A revised consent process was introduced in February 2008 and modified in April 2009 in line with the nationally agreed ERHA Guidelines.

The process of internal and external audit continued throughout 2008 and continues this year under my Mastership and is overseen by the Board of the Hospital.

Key Performance Indicators have been put in place that measure compliance and the targets we have set ourselves. These are audited monthly and reported to me and onto the Board. A policy of minimal organ retention now operates in the Hospital. Where it is strictly necessary, it must be for a limited period only. Using a process known as 'fast fixing' technology, we have reduced the need for organ retention. Retention now happens only in exceptional cases.

I can say with absolute certainty we now have a high quality post mortem service that has been validated by our own audit of 2008 and, independently, in June 2009 by Ms Michaela Willis on behalf of the HSE. The Rotunda will also be working/co-operating with the HSE on a 6 monthly external review of post mortem services.

With regard to professional performance, the findings of the Reports raised serious issues of concern to the Hospital, which require careful examination. Insofar as there may be implications for any individual employee there are established procedures that must be followed and which require due process and strict confidentiality.

As Master of the Rotunda Hospital, I recognise that what happened in some cases, prior to 2008, was unacceptable, particularly during a traumatic and sad period for bereaved parents.



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We are sincerely sorry for any hurt caused and for the time taken to deal with the issues that have arisen. We will be holding a service of recognition and healing for all affected parents and staff in the Pillar Room at the Rotunda Hospital. We will extend an open invitation to all affected parents and their families.

We have rectified our processes, put in place new policies and procedures, and the tools necessary to monitor these. These will ensure we remain compliant with best practice into the future.

Most of all, we hope to continue to care for our patients with the best medical and clinical practice. With appropriate humility, we will seek to restore their faith in us here in the Rotunda Hospital.



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