

An independent investigation into potential missed opportunities for identification and avoidance of possible harm to paediatric orthopaedic patients at Cambridge University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust

1. Background and introduction

- 1.1 Ms Kuldeep Stohr (KS) has been employed as a paediatric orthopaedic surgeon at Cambridge University Hospitals (CUH) since 2012 and is currently suspended.
- 1.2 In March 2024, KS took a period of absence and her work was picked up by colleagues. These colleagues subsequently raised concerns with the Medical Director's office regarding the outcomes of the paediatric surgery and some of the decision making by KS.
- 1.3 To investigate further, the Medical Director's office engaged an external surgeon from Nottingham University Hospitals NHS Trust, Mr James Hunter, in October 2024 who evaluated a number of paediatric elective cases from all surgeons in the team and concluded that there was an issue with KS's practice. The external expert's interim report was received on 16 December 2024, with further reports received on 14 January 2025 and 17 February 2025.
- 1.4 The reports concluded that a number of KS's patients who had complex surgery for dysplastic hips over a two-year period had experienced significant harm. The reports found evidence of poor operative technique and issues with KS's decision making.
- 1.5 KS has not undertaken any clinical practice at CUH since March 2024.
- 1.6 As a result of Mr Hunter's findings, the Trust has contacted all patients and families where harm has been identified to arrange follow-up appointments and to exercise Duty of Candour. A further external clinical review has been commissioned of KS's clinical practice during their employment with CUH and the quality of care received by patients. This will be chaired by Andrew Kennedy KC.
- 1.7 The Trust's Director of Strategy and Major Projects has commissioned Verita, a specialist investigations company, to carry out an independent investigation into what was known when about the practice of KS and whether there were opportunities to have identified these issues sooner.

2. Terms of reference

- 2.1 Verita will report on any gaps in systems, processes and governance arrangements in the paediatric orthopaedics department and the wider Trust and make appropriate recommendations for learning and improvement.
- 2.2 Verita will not examine the clinical care and treatment of individual patients of KS which is the subject of the separate external retrospective clinical review. Verita will liaise as necessary with those conducting the external clinical review.
- 2.3 For clarity, information from this investigation may lead to further inquiries or action being undertaken.
- 2.4 The investigation will comprise two parts. This phasing will allow Verita to highlight any concerns that require immediate corrective action by the Trust to maintain patient safety, without waiting for the full investigation to be completed.

Part 1: 2015-2016

- 2.5 Verita will:
 - Investigate the appropriateness, proportionality and effectiveness of the actions taken by the Trust in response to concerns raised in 2015 regarding KS's practice. This will include the commissioning of an external clinical review in 2016 and the Trust's response to the findings and recommendations of that review.

Part 2: 2012-2024

- 2.6 Verita will:
 - Assess the effectiveness of the management and governance arrangements (including policies, procedures and processes) within the paediatric orthopaedic department governing the clinical activities of KS, and report on the extent to which they were complied with.
 - Identify any gaps in these arrangements which may have prevented identification and/or addressing of concerns about KS's practice.
 - Assess the effectiveness of the management and governance arrangements (including policies, procedures and processes) at a divisional and Trust-wide level relating to oversight and assurance on the clinical activities of KS and the paediatric orthopaedic department more widely, and report on the extent to which they were complied with.
 - Identify any gaps in these arrangements which may have prevented identification and/or addressing of concerns about KS's practice.
 - Identify any concerns raised by Trust colleagues about KS (in addition to the specific concerns covered in Part 1 of the investigation),

including concerns raised in 2024, and comment on the appropriateness of any action taken in response to such concerns.

- Identify any 'hard data', such as complaints and patient safety incidents, or 'soft signals' relating to KS and comment on the appropriateness of any action taken in response to these.

- 2.7 If, through its conduct of this investigation, Verita identifies any broader issues or concerns about the Trust's policies, processes and practices which might require separate investigation or review, it will draw these to the attention of the commissioner.

3. Methodology and engagement with participants

- 3.1 Verita will conduct the investigation in the spirit of the Trust's just and learning culture. The team will ensure that all participants have the opportunity to contribute to the learning from the investigation. Verita will, at all times, follow best practice in the conduct of the investigation.
- 3.2 The investigation has no explicit performance management or disciplinary remit. However, if Verita identifies evidence of specific shortcomings in the handling of any of the matters under investigation, the investigation team will flag them to the commissioner to consider any further action.
- 3.3 Verita will gather and evaluate all relevant documentation and written evidence held by the Trust concerning the clinical activities of KS and all relevant governance arrangements.
- 3.4 Verita will also gather and evaluate testimonial evidence from a range of Trust staff and others as required. All potential interviewees will be notified in writing and invited to speak to the investigation team. Participants will be given written guidance on what to expect in the process and all interviewees will be offered the opportunity to be accompanied to interview by a union representative or work colleague. Verita will make any necessary adjustments to the interview process to allow staff to participate fully.
- 3.5 Interviews may be held remotely or face-to-face. With the permission of the interviewee, interviews will be recorded. Interviewees will be offered the opportunity to see and correct a transcript of their evidence.
- 3.6 The investigation will be conducted in private. Participants will be required to maintain confidentiality about the investigation and any evidence they give. Interviewees must not divulge any information about the investigation to anyone apart from their companion (if this option is exercised), who must similarly maintain this confidentiality.

- 3.7 The Trust will provide an initial list of interviewees. Verita will be free to interview any other people, inside or outside the Trust, who may have relevant evidence to contribute to the terms of reference. Any additional interviews will be conducted at the sole discretion of the investigation team.

4. Outputs of the investigation

- 4.1 Verita will provide a written report incorporating both parts of the investigation to the Trust. The report will contain clear recommendations aimed at learning any lessons from these events.
- 4.2 An initial draft will be provided to the commissioner to allow for fact checking before it is finalised.
- 4.3 If any individual may be criticised in the report they will have the opportunity to see and comment on the potential criticism before the report is finalised.
- 4.4 After fact checking is complete, Verita will provide the final report as a full, frank and detailed written account to the Trust's Board of Directors. The final report will be published at the Trust's discretion.

5. Timescales

- 5.1 Verita has begun preparations for the investigation and the team expects to conclude its work by the end of July 2025.
- 5.2 The investigation will be conducted in a timely manner, subject to the availability of witnesses and evidence. Verita will report any undue delays to the commissioner.