

BBC News
Panorama
Current Affairs
17th Apr 08

Panorama Programme 27th April 2008-04-14

Thank you for your letter of 11th April 2008. As previously advised for legal reasons I have refrained from participating in the programme. However for the BBC to continue to see the issue of infection control and Clostridium Difficile as purely a Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells issue is inaccurate and misleading, the evidence over the past 12-18 months shows this is a national issue, causing significant numbers of deaths in the NHS.

The Board of MTW inherited an organisation with an huge range of long standing problems affecting patient care. These could not be addressed in one year and were prioritised into a range of patient specific and strategic objectives outlined in the Boards' annual corporate objectives. (a publicly available document) These were all pursued vigorously. The Trust was heavily performance managed and individual's subjected to tremendous pressure on behalf of the DoH by the Strategic Health Authority on the attainment of government targets and priorities, which are not optional for Trusts. Interestingly in the local SHA prior to the summer of 2006 Clostridium Difficile was not part of this agenda, and was still not of primary importance on these agendas in September 2007.

I focused on patient specific issues and addressed these through staffing, practise, policy, organisational and major strategic changes. There are many examples of this from changes to maternity and medical services, recruitment of medical staff, renewal of equipment and environmental improvements through to infection control. Performance was reviewed and I responded as my knowledge and understanding increased or as the situation altered. The Clostridium Difficile issue shows this as the incidence fell dramatically from April 2006, once I understood its implications and causes.

I can confirm that as CEO I was approachable staff met me regularly in open forums or as individuals and raised issues with ease because they knew I would respond as appropriate. I was determined and focused on patients, and had a developmental approach to staff as seen by a

substantial organisational programme of change covering managerial, clinical and medical staff which included directors, managers and front line clinical leaders.

I was prepared for and on behalf of the Board and in the interests of the public to address the difficult issues which included clinical practice and did so on many occasions in order to safeguard patients. For example when clinical staff continued to demonstrate poor compliance despite involvement and good medical leadership I made difficult decisions to remove antibiotics from shelves to enforce the new antibiotic policy, I stopped medical staff performing procedures when they could not demonstrate best practice or outcomes etc. These decisions are never easy and do not result in popularity even when done in the interest of patients.

I did not leave my post as CEO willingly, I believed that I should stay and account to the public, which is why I stayed after the April 06' outbreak and continued to take action to improve infection control at the hospitals. The death of any patient if avoidable is always tragic and I offer my sincere apologies and condolences to those who may have suffered such losses in the NHS and in particular Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rose', with a horizontal line underneath.

Rose Marie Gibb