

21 January 2015

Coroner Peter White  
Coroners Court of Victoria  
65 Kavanagh Street  
**SOUTHBANK VIC 3006**

55 Commercial Road  
Melbourne Vic 3004  
PO Box 315 Prahran  
Victoria 3181 Australia  
Telephone 03 9076 2000  
[www.alfred.org.au](http://www.alfred.org.au)

Dear Coroner White

**Court Reference: COR 2007/3955**

We refer to your recommendation arising from the Inquest into the death of the late Mr Kelvin Robert Davidson

**Recommendation**

*I recommend to Alfred Health that in all cases of observation down grade from special nursing level, that a consultant medical officer reviews the patient concerned in person and record details of the clinical reasons for so deciding.*

**Alfred Health Response**

The current Alfred Health guideline *Psychiatry – All inpatient nursing observation and patient engagement* applies to all inpatient nursing staff undertaking nursing observation for the purpose of mental health assessment across Alfred Psychiatry Inpatient Units – Adult and Aged.

The guideline is aimed at outlining a framework for nursing observations for patient's receiving psychiatric treatment in the inpatient unit; this includes the process for reduction in the level of observation. It notes that:

- *The reduction in the level of observation occurs through discussion between the nursing and medical teams. The medical officer and allocated nurse are required to document the risk assessment and allocate the reduction in observation on the Alfred Psychiatry clinical risk screen. The nursing assessment must be undertaken by a Registered Nurse. To ensure patients are not left on an increased level inappropriately it is recommended that teams plan ahead, particularly at weekends, clarifying the circumstances that would enable a reduction in observation level.*
  
- *The reduction in the level of observation is a team decision. The medical officer and allocated nurse are required to document the risk assessment and allocate the reduction in observation on the Alfred Psychiatry clinical risk screen.*

The practice across Alfred Psychiatry in-patient units is that no downgrading of nursing observations from 'special nursing' (Level 4 observations), is determined without review by the consultant psychiatrist or at a minimum liaison between the registered nurse and the registrar followed by consultation with the consultant psychiatrist. These discussions and decisions are documented in the clinical file and in the *Alfred Psychiatry Clinical Risk Screen*.

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**MEDICAL SERVICES**

Dr Lee Hamley  
Executive Director Medical Services The  
Alfred/Chief Medical Officer Alfred Health  
Email: [l.hamley@alfred.org.au](mailto:l.hamley@alfred.org.au)

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## Recommendation

*I further recommend that in all cases described in recommendation one above, where a consultant medical officer is unavailable to see a patient receiving special nursing and recommended for downgrade, that any approval for an observation downgrade by such a consultant should be given through an IT approval system, which includes a time stamped document review, and a further clinical review setting out the consultant medical officers reasons for so deciding.*

## Alfred Health Response

When a patient's level of nursing observation requires downgrading from 'special nursing' (Level 4 observations) and the consultant psychiatrist is unavailable to conduct a face to face assessment, consultation occurs between the registrar and the registered nurse in the first instance. If the registrar concurs with the downgrading he/she will then consult with the consultant psychiatrist.

All changes in the level of nursing observations are documented in the *Alfred Psychiatry Clinical Risk Screen* and the document is signed by the medical officer noting the date and time. This document is scanned into the medical record at a later date.

Until such time as the Alfred Psychiatry Inpatient Units are able to transition into a fully electronic medical record, this recommendation is unable to be implemented in full. Though it is possible to complete this form electronically at present, to do so would pose other risks: the working file would be separate from the document with the added risk so that changes to the level of observations would not be readily visible and observable when staff are reading and making notes in the file by hand.

I trust this response satisfactorily addresses your Recommendations.

Yours sincerely



**Dr Lee Hamley**  
**Executive Director Medical Services, The Alfred**  
**Chief Medical Officer Alfred Health**