

Safety Information Message

Reference: SIM2305

Issued: 01 December 2023

Review Date: 01 December 2024

Restricting public access to information on ligatures, points of ligature and other means of self-harm

Summary

This safety information message (SIM) is issued as a reminder that public-facing websites should not be used to publish policies, protocols, guidelines, tools, safety alerts or similar documents that illustrate or describe the detail of ligatures, points of ligature and other means of self-harm. Any content of this nature currently on public-facing websites should be removed immediately and periodic checks should be carried out.

This SIM supplements Safety Action Notice SAN(SC)20/02¹, *Ligature and ligature point risk assessment tools and policies*, published in March 2020

Action

The following actions were included in Safety Action Notice SAN(SC)20/02¹, *Ligature and ligature point risk assessment tools and policies*, published on 17 March 2020. It may therefore only be necessary to check the actions implemented at that time remain in place:

- **Remove** from public-facing websites all policies, protocols, guidelines, tools or similar documents** that include descriptions and illustrations of ligature points, ligatures, or detail of any other means of self-harm.
- **Revise** local publication procedures to include a step that provides confirmation prior to upload to public-facing websites that publication does not risk the safety of vulnerable people including patients and the public.

** It is acceptable for these to be provided on internal websites that are not public facing.

This safety information message is for action by: all organisations that have local policies, guidance or tools for ligature risk assessment, including mental health units, prison healthcare, and acute hospitals with areas in emergency departments adapted for the assessment of people with mental health needs.

Caution

Do NOT circulate, print, publish or cascade this safety information message. Share it only with the nominated Executive Lead (or equivalent), and those who need to carry-out the above actions. A placeholder can be uploaded to intranets and public facing websites if needed for completeness.

This precaution will avoid drawing to the attention of vulnerable people the possibility that information on ligatures, points of ligature and other means of self-harm may be available on other healthcare providers' public websites before they have removed them.

Background

Safety Action Notice SAN(SC)20/02¹, *Ligature and ligature point risk assessment tools and policies*, was issued in Scotland on 17 March 2020. It followed National Patient Safety Alert NatPSA/2020/001/NHSPS, which was issued in England.

Both alerts highlighted that services providing mental health care routinely develop guidance on environmental improvements and safe management during clinical care to reduce the risk of self-harm or suicide death. This guidance may unavoidably give detailed descriptions of ligatures and ligature points that could be found within local units. The actions in these alerts was intended to prevent this information becoming available on public facing websites and co-ordination was required across all four UK health systems.

It has subsequently been found that some health boards have local ligature risk assessment information accessible to patients and the public on public-facing websites. These documents include detailed lists of types of potential ligatures and ligature points and in some cases include photographs of ligature points on furniture and fittings in local mental health units. It is possible they were inadvertently included when batches of policies and procedures were published for the purposes of transparency after SAN(SC)20/02 had been issued.

It is important to protect vulnerable people from accessing detailed information on how they could harm themselves. It is also important to conceal the detail of how patients have been able to harm themselves in healthcare settings where people at high risk of self-harm are cared for. Suicides in healthcare settings are not common but intentional self-harm incidents do occur every year and are reported to local incident and risk management systems.

References

1. Safety Action Notice SAN(SC)20/02, *Ligature and ligature point risk assessment tools and policies*, Health Facilities Scotland, 17 March 2020.

SAN(SC)20/02 was distributed by email to a controlled distribution. It has not been posted on the NSS website and copies may only be obtained by written request to nss.irc@nhs.scot.

Enquiries

Enquiries and adverse incident reports should be addressed to:

Incident Reporting & Investigation Centre (IRIC)

NHS National Services Scotland

Tel: 0131 275 7575 Email: nss.irc@nhs.scot

Accessibility: Please contact us using the above details if you are blind or have a sight impairment and would like to request this alert in a more suitable format.

IRIC remit: general information about adverse incidents, safety alerts and IRIC's role can be found in [CEL 43 \(2009\)](#), *Safety of Health, Social Care, Estates and Facilities Equipment: NHS Board and Local Authority Responsibilities*, issued 30 October 2009.

Report an incident: Information on [how to report an adverse incident](#)

NHS National Services Scotland is the common name for the Common Services Agency for the Scottish Health Service <https://www.nss.nhs.scot/>