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Freedom of Information Act Disclosure log - Reply Extract

You asked

We have been studying what we can learn from the content of patient complaints. Our research indicates that letters of complaint can contain valuable information that can inform organizational learning.

We published a review of how letters of complaint have been studied in the past. You can read about this research in the *British Medical Journal: Quality & Safety* (open access link: <http://qualitysafety.bmj.com/content/early/2014/05/29/bmjqs-2013-002437.full>)

On the basis of this review, we created a comprehensive and reliable tool for learning from healthcare complaints. You can read about this research (open access link: <http://qualitysafety.bmj.com/content/early/2016/01/22/bmjqs-2015-004596.full>)

The tool, called the Healthcare Complaints Analysis Tool, is freely available at:

http://qualitysafety.bmj.com/content/suppl/2016/01/05/bmjqs-2015-004596.DC1/bmjqs-2015-004596supp_new.pdf

We now want to apply this new analysis tool to letters of complaint received by NHS Acute Hospitals. In order to obtain a sample of complaints we are making the following Freedom of Information request.

FOI request: We request the first 25 type-written letters of complaint that your Trust received after 1st October 2013. If your Trust contains more than one unit, we request that the letters are from across the units.

Anonymity of patient letters: The letters will contain personally identifying information, and we request that all personally identifying information be redacted from the letters (i.e., information about addresses, dates, units attended, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, age etc.). We only request information about the patient's experience of the NHS. We understand that the resultant letters may be heavily redacted.

Why we have selected your Trust: Your trust has been randomly selected. We want a national sample of letters of complaint received by NHS Acute Trusts, and your Trust is an Acute Trust.

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Anonymity of your Trust: The name of your trust, will not appear in any of our research. The letters which you provide will be aggregated with letters from other Trusts, and will in no way be traceable back to your trust. We are not interested in the identity of any particular Trust.

Our reply

Plymouth Hospitals NHS Trust is confirming in accordance with section 1 (a) of the Act that it holds the information requested and is refusing the request. The Trust does not have the permission of the data subjects to release their correspondence; albeit in a redacted form.

This avoids a breach of the first two Data Protection Act principles. This is in accordance with section 40.-(2)(a) and (b) by virtue of section 40.-(3)(a)(i), the personal information exemption as described in the Freedom of Information Act.