

## PE1393/G

Child Sexual Exploitation in Scotland – Petition PE 1393  
Response Submitted on behalf of NHS Lothian

The issue of child protection including child sexual exploitation is of paramount concern for NHS Lothian and its partner agencies. The points raised in the petition are key areas for consideration and further development both for NHS Lothian and the Child Protection Committees across the Edinburgh, Lothian and Borders Executive Group (ELBEG) area on which the NHS is strongly represented.

The Child Protection Committees across Lothian have a number of inter-agency protocols and procedures in place to support staff to recognise children and young people at risk of abuse and neglect including sexual exploitation. We are confident that professionals instigate child protection procedures by referring to one of the key agencies of health, social work or police through the interagency referral process when they have a concern that a child or young person may be at risk of or suffering abuse and neglect.

There is specific guidance in place to address the issue of Child Trafficking.

- Edinburgh and the Lothians Child Protection Procedures
- Under-age Sexual Activity Interagency Guidance (2011)
- East and Midlothian Inter-Agency Guidance on Child Trafficking
- West Lothian Human Trafficking Protocol
- Edinburgh Child Trafficking Guidance for Service Providers

On behalf of NHS Lothian I have, with colleagues, considered the petition from Barnardo's and explored the three main requests:

1. Barnardo's are calling for new research to be commissioned by the Scottish Government in order to fully quantify and understand the degree and nature of Child Sexual Exploitation in Scotland.

Agencies are not fully aware of the extent and nature of the problem in Scotland. From a Public Health perspective if we cannot quantify the problem it then becomes extremely difficult to take subsequent preventative action. In addition in order to identify at an early stage and put in place effective intervention strategies and support we need to appreciate the impact on children and families.

We fully support the request to undertake more research in this area.

2. The petition is calling for local authorities to report back on the extent to which they are delivering on the commitments and action points in the 2003 guidance.

It may be helpful for local authorities to report back on the extent they are delivering on the action points from the 2003 guidance. However, it is more important to move forward by carrying out new research and providing

detailed up to date guidance for professionals which incorporates the legislative changes as well as an explosion in online activity since the original guidance was produced.

3. The petition is calling for the Scottish Government to update the 2003 guidance.

As highlighted in the petition there is some reference to child sexual exploitation in the revised National Child Protection Guidance (2010). This relates in the main to a paragraph on online sexual exploitation in the context of investigations into organised abuse. We are confident NHS staff adhere to child protection procedures when they are concerned a child or young person is at risk of abuse or neglect. The 2003 guidance identified some of the triggers and indicators was helpful in providing professionals with the tools to understand some of the issues and how they might identify and support children and young people at risk of sexual exploitation. The revised National Guidance does not address these issues in detail.

There has also been a considerable change since 2003 in online activity and use of the social media, for example facebook and twitter were introduced after 2003. The impact of social media sites on the sexual exploitation of children and young people requires to be understood more fully.

We would welcome some more detailed guidance to cover the full spectrum of child sexual exploitation. This would increase professional's awareness across agencies. It would be extremely helpful if the guidance addressed in detail the problems children and young people face in this area and provide examples of effective interventions and what works in supporting children and young people who are being sexually exploited.

On behalf of NHS Lothian we fully support the request from Barnardo's. More detailed research as well as interagency guidance in this field would enhance professional understanding of this important increasing problem and support agencies in taking appropriate action.

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