

24 July 2012

Dear Editor,

The Children's Heart Federation has been watching the campaign in Leeds with growing concerns because of the spread of inaccurate and disingenuous information which has led to unnecessary fear amongst the families whose children are treated at Leeds Hospital. We are writing to you about a number of inaccuracies which were broadcast during the interview of Sharon Cheng, Director of The Children's Heart Surgery Fund (CHSF), on BBC Look North (Yorkshire) on Monday 23 July 2012.

The following statements made by Ms Cheng (CHSF) were ill-informed and incorrect:

1. Regarding the number of transplantations carried out at The Freeman Hospital (Newcastle) Ms Cheng said that, '*not many are done up in Newcastle I believe in the last 10 years it's between 7 to 10*'. **This is clearly incorrect.** According to the UKCTA, 8 were conducted in 2005, 10 in 2006, 13 in 2007, 13 in 2008, 14 in 2009 and 21 in 2010 (more than Great Ormond Street Hospital in this year). **So to clarify in a six year period, even less than the 10 years on which Ms Cheng bases her comment, the Freeman Hospital has dealt with 79 far in excess of 7 to 10.**
2. Other centres could carry out Transplantation and '*In fact Leeds could do Transplants*'. This is again unfounded. An expert panel advised that of the current units **only Birmingham Children's Hospital** 'demonstrated a sufficient ability to assume paediatric cardiothoracic and bridge to transplant services if required' (NHS Specialised Services, Safe and Sustainable: Decision Making Business Case, 2012).
3. 'We have all services already' at Leeds. This again is not correct. Services such as ECHMO and Transplantation are not located at Leeds. Your viewers may be interested in the comments of Independent Expert Panel when reviewing the service at Leeds (<http://bit.ly/eC2LDp>)

Standards	Compliance	Gaps in Compliance
Development plans/ risks to meeting standards C64, C65 and F6 (if not all ready achieving)	The paediatric cardiac surgery service is going to participate in a trust-wide lean programme in the near future; however whilst the service is going to undergo a review as part of the trust-wide programme, the panel felt that the Trust had little insight into what the service should look like in the future.	The panel felt that the Trust was not sufficiently reflective over the inefficiencies in current working practices and the panel noted clear inefficiencies and systems failure in anaesthesia and theatres.

4. That Birmingham currently carries out Transplantations. Ms Cheng stated, '*These sorts of operations should be carried out in a centre where many of them are done. I.e. Birmingham, London.*' **This is again incorrect, only the Freeman Hospital and Great Ormond Street carries out transplantation not Birmingham.**
5. That '*transplantation, it's a fact, it's a planned operation*'. Parents have to travel at often very short notice when a viable organ becomes available for their child and this is done safely and effectively. The suggestion that it is only acceptable/safe to travel for planned procedures and not emergencies is unfounded and goes against the weight of evidence available.

The inaccuracies of Ms Cheng's interview, whilst we are sure were not deliberate, have the ability to mislead many concerned parents and worry them unduly.

In view of the strength of feeling and the climate of fear and misunderstanding around the Safe and Sustainable Review and the future provision of children's heart surgery regarding the Leeds Paediatric Heart Services it is important that there is clear, open debate about the facts and that inaccuracies are challenged. There are many parents who hold views that differ from those held by the Children's Heart Surgery Fund and it is important that they are heard too. We were disturbed by the assumptions and inaccurate statements made by Ms Cheng and broadcast by you regarding planned operations and the amount of care at Leeds.

We would welcome the opportunity to talk to you about this further, or to correct such inaccuracies through a further interview or comment.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Keatley-Clarke
Chief Executive
Children's Heart Federation