

From: "EASTERLING, Tom (NHS ENGLAND)" <*****>
Subject: RE: NHS England & PVK
Date: 9 August 2017 at 11:11:22 BST
To: Clare Sardari <*****>

Dear Clare

Thank you for your email. To respond to your questions:

1. I am told that an informal referral was initially made to NHS Protect by South Devon Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and this was then followed by a formal referral by South Devon Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and NHS England in April 2014.
2. No disclosure was made to NHS Improvement so there is no further correspondence to share.
3. As I previously explained, referrals to NHS Protect are confidential and it would not have been appropriate for us to inform other bodies that we had made a referral to NHS Protect. It is the responsibility of employers to assure themselves that potential employees are fit and proper persons.

Yours sincerely

Tom

Tom Easterling
Director of the Chair and Chief Executive's Office
NHS England

Health and high quality care for all, now and for future generations

From: Clare Sardari [*****]
Sent: 20 July 2017 10:54
To: EASTERLING, Tom (NHS ENGLAND)
Cc: CE, England (NHS ENGLAND)
Subject: Re: NHS England & PVK

Dear Mr Easterling,

Thank you for your email and for confirming the facts as regards NHS England's referral of Paula Vasco Knight to NHS Protect.

1. Please may I double check the date of NHS England's referral to NHS Protect. You say in your email that the referral was made in April 2014. This is anomalous as NHS Protect disclosed that its investigation started in March 2014. So the referral must presumably have been made in March 2014, or prior to March 2014.
2. Please can you advise as requested in my original email of 21 June 2017 if NHS England has made full disclosure to NHS Improvement about its knowledge of Paula Vasco Knight's fraud since at least 2014? And if so, please disclose the requested correspondence between NHS England and NHS Improvement regarding this.
3. Please could you also advise if faced with the same situation again, would NHS England do anything differently, or would it again take no action to warn other bodies that they might be putting patients at risk through the appointment of individuals who do not fulfil the requirements of CQC Regulation 5 Fit and Proper Persons?

Whilst you appear to imply that no action will be taken because there is a presumption of innocence, it is relevant to point out that St Georges immediately terminated Paula Vasco-Knight's agency contract as an interim Chief Executive when it found out about the criminal charges against her.

There is an argument that where the protection of patients is paramount, the proportionate sharing of relevant information is necessary.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Clare Sardari

From: "EASTERLING, Tom (NHS ENGLAND)" <*****>
Subject: RE: NHS England & PVK
Date: 19 July 2017 at 13:54:26 BST
To: "Clare Sardari" <*****>

Dear Clare

I can now confirm that NHS England did indeed make a formal referral to NHS Protect in April 2014. I was not aware of this when I wrote to you on 11 July.

Referrals to NHS Protect are confidential and it would not be appropriate for us to inform other bodies when such referrals are made. This is for two reasons: first, there has to be a presumption of innocence while investigations are taking place and second, NHS Protect's investigations could be undermined if the individual being referred should become aware of the referral.

As I previously explained, I did alert NHS Improvement at the point I became aware that Paula Vasco-Knight was to be charged with fraud.

Yours sincerely

Tom

Tom Easterling
Director of the Chair and Chief Executive's Office
NHS England

Health and high quality care for all, now and for future generations

From: EASTERLING, Tom (NHS ENGLAND)
Sent: 14 July 2017 10:15
To: Clare Sardari <*****>
Subject: FW: NHS England & PVK

Dear Clare

Thank you for your email addressed to Simon Stevens. I am responding on his behalf.

Thank you for drawing our attention to the NHS Protect FOIA disclosure. I will indeed follow up with NHS Protect to establish who in NHS England made the referral.

Yours sincerely

Tom

Tom Easterling
Director of the Chair and Chief Executive's Office
NHS England

Health and high quality care for all, now and for future generations

From: Clare Sardari [mailto:*****]
Sent: 13 July 2017 10:40
To: CE, England (NHS ENGLAND)
Subject: Fwd: NHS England & PVK

BY EMAIL

Simon Stevens
Chief Executive
NHS England

13 July 2017

Dear Mr Stevens,

Factual inaccuracy by NHS England

Further to my letter to you, below, of 21 June I received a reply from Mr Tom Easterling on your behalf which appears to be factually inaccurate and which claims that NHS England did not know that Paula Vasco-Knight was under investigation for criminal fraud until 28 April 2016.

NHS Protect previously advised very clearly via FOIA (reference number 6681, published 1 March 2017) that it commenced its investigation after receiving **a joint referral from South Devon Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust and NHS England** about the fraud.

NHS Protect's FOIA disclosure is in the public domain:

https://apps.nhsbsa.nhs.uk/FOI/foiRequestDetail.do?bo_id=6681

I see that Mr Easterling phrases his denial: "As far as I can establish...".

I suggest that NHS England liaises with NHS Protect to establish who in NHS England made the referral and works backwards from that point to address my specific requests for information on this serious matter of governance, probity and public interest.

Yours sincerely,

Clare Sardari

Begin forwarded message:

From: "EASTERLING, Tom (NHS ENGLAND)"

<*****>

Subject: FW: NHS England & PVK

Date: 11 July 2017 at 12:53:48 BST

To: "Clare Sardari" <*****>

Dear Clare

Thank you for your email addressed to Simon Stevens. I am responding on his behalf.

I am sorry to hear that you have been harmed as a result of whistleblowing and recognise your concern that we should learn from the handling of Paula Vasco-Knight's case.

Paula Vasco-Knight worked for NHS England on a part-time basis up to January 2014. On 28 April 2016, we were informed by NHS Protect that a member of our staff was being charged with fraud, together with Paula Vasco-Knight and her husband. I informed NHS Improvement the following day as I was aware that Paula Vasco-Knight had recently been appointed to an interim role at Georges Foundation NHS Trust.

As far as I can establish, NHS England was not aware that Paula Vasco-Knight was under investigation prior to 28 April 2016. I understand that she was referred to NHS Protect by South Devon Healthcare NHS Trust, and I can't find any record of NHS England being involved in the referral.

I can confirm that we haven't disclosed any further material on this matter to NHS Improvement (i.e. in addition to the notification I shared with them in April last year).

I hope this is helpful.

Yours sincerely

Tom

Tom Easterling
Director of the Chair and Chief Executive's Office
NHS England

From: Clare Sardari [mailto:*****]
Sent: 21 June 2017 19:50
To: CE, England (NHS ENGLAND)
Subject: NHS England & PVK

Simon Stevens Chief Executive

NHS England

21 June 2017

Dear Mr Simon Stevens,

NHS England's role in the Paula Vasco-Knight case

I am one of the two South Devon whistleblowers who were harmed by Paula Vasco-Knight and others.

You will likely be aware that Paula Vasco-Knight was subsequently convicted of a criminal fraud and received a suspended prison sentence.

As NHS England previously appointed her to a position of national prominence, I write to ask what specific learning there has been by NHS England since the NHS Protect prosecution.

What does NHS England do now to ensure that the senior managers whom it appoints and promotes are of sound character?

Is NHS England doing anything differently as a result of the Paula Vasco-Knight affair?

Please also advise what action, if any, NHS England took to prevent Paula Vasco-Knight being re-appointed to a NHS board position after it raised suspicions with NHS Protect about her fraud.

I ask as I understand from FOI data that NHS Protect started its investigation on Vasco-Knight in March 2014, after a joint referral by NHS England and South Devon Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

If upon learning of her alleged fraud, NHS England took no action to prevent her re-appointment to an NHS board position or to alert regulators such as NHS Improvement or St Georges of the criminal matters hanging over her, please advise of the rationale for this.

Please also advise if NHS England would handle such a situation differently in the future.

Has NHS England made full disclosure to NHS Improvement about its role in making the referral to NHS Protect, and its knowledge of the fraud allegations for over three years before her criminal case was concluded?

I ask as in an email by your office on the evening of 3 May 2016, in response to a request from Jim Mackey, NHS England informed Jim Mackey only that it was informed of NHS Protect's decision to prosecute in 2016. NHS England did not disclose that it had been aware of the fraud allegations for much longer than that.

If NHS England has made a more complete disclosure to NHS Improvement, please disclose the relevant records/ correspondence.

As a harmed whistleblower, I have not only found it difficult to find further employment in the NHS, but I have suffered pension loss as part of the whistleblowing detriment.

I hope you can understand that the very least that I would like to see is some sign of learning by the NHS from the recurrent governance failures associated with the Vasco-Knight affair.

Yours sincerely,

Clare

Clare Sardari