

Written Ministerial Statement

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Department of Health

MUCKAMORE ABBEY PUBLIC INQUIRY

Published at 7.00 pm on Thursday 7 October 2021.

Mr Swann (The Minister of Health): On 8 September 2020, I advised Members of my intention to establish a Public Inquiry, under the Inquiries Act 2005, into the circumstances surrounding abuse of patients at Muckamore Abbey Hospital. I further advised Members in my written statement to the Assembly, on 30 June 2021, of the appointment of Tom Kark QC as Chair of the Inquiry.

On 29th September 2021, I made a written statement to the Assembly publishing the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry, confirming the setting up date to be 11th October 2021 and confirming that Prof Glynis Murphy and Dr Peter Carter had been appointed as Panel Members.

On 1st October 2021, I was made aware by the Royal College of Nursing (RCN), of a possible conflict of interest concerning Dr Peter Carter. Dr Carter is a former Chief Executive and General Secretary of the RCN.

Tom Kark QC, Chair of the Inquiry, has advised me that, following discussions with him, Dr Carter has now agreed to withdraw as a panel member in the interests of the inquiry.

While the inquiry chair had initially been satisfied that Dr Carter's past RCN role raised no issues, further discussion with Dr Carter revealed issues which could give the perception of conflict. When it comes to conflict of interest, perception is almost as important as reality.

The decision should in no way be seen as a criticism of Dr Carter. I wish to thank him for his co-operation in this regard and for making himself available to serve on the panel.

This development will not delay the Inquiry, the starting date will remain 11th October 2021. I am pleased to be able to announce that on the recommendation of the Inquiry Chair, I have appointed Dr Elaine Maxwell, who has considerable experience as a senior nurse, an executive director of nursing and an expert in patient safety to replace Dr Carter as a Panel Member.

Muckamore Abbey Hospital patients and families continue to remain at the forefront of my thoughts as the Inquiry embarks on its statutory responsibilities. It is of the utmost importance that the integrity of the Inquiry is maintained and I will ensure that all steps are taken to ensure robust governance arrangements are in place to facilitate this.

I remain confident the establishment of the independent Muckamore Abbey Hospital Inquiry will enable a full and transparent investigation of the circumstances of the abuse, and ensure lessons are learned in order to improve our healthcare systems and restore public confidence in our healthcare services.