

MEDIA RELEASE

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Nelson Marlborough Health statement and information relating to the *Serious event review into the care and treatment of RK (Rosemary Marks)*.

To be attributed to Dr Nick Baker, Chief Medical Officer and Paediatrician, Nelson Marlborough Health

Reflecting on Ruby Knox

When the news of Donella Knox's conviction for murder was first made public, I extended sympathy to the large number of health and support staff – both at Nelson Marlborough Health and in the community – who supported and cared for Ruby since early childhood.

I would like to take the opportunity to do this again because publicity around this review will undoubtedly prompt a strong emotional reaction.

As stated by Justice Joe Williams in his sentencing of Donella Knox – Ruby's disabilities did not lessen the highest value the law places on human life.

We cannot overstate the challenges faced by those offering care and support for people with complex needs. Every case is different with unique sets of issues.

Autism is one of the most challenging conditions to provide care and support for. Nelson Marlborough Health, and New Zealand as a whole, has invested in services to support people with autism over the last ten years.

These include the development of guidelines and care pathways, enhanced support services and the employment of an autism service co-ordinator. The recommendations in this review have prompted further improvement at our regional DHB level, and also put the spotlight on opportunities for national-level system improvement.

About the review and its recommendations

The purpose of the review was to identify any care and service delivery problems that may have contributed to the death of Ruby Knox and to make recommendations for improvements.

The main focuses of the review were to:

- i) identify improvements to the systems NMH has to transition patients, who have lifelong severe behavioural and physical disabilities and complex health needs, from paediatrics care to adult care. Improving services that support the transition from paediatrics to adult care is a priority for both Nelson Marlborough Health and for the South Island Child Health Alliance.

- ii) identify how to manage the risks that arise when parents or caregivers decline support or do not use the healthcare and support available to them.
- iii) identify how caring professionals should and can respond when they have concerns about possible family violence where the potential victim is over 17 years of age but who is vulnerable and unable to care for themselves.

It's important to look at systems in this way. This is because while the likelihood of a chain of events leading to Ruby's murder happening again is low, the likelihood of us treating and caring for young people with autism and complex needs is high.

In Ruby's case, this chain of events include very uncommon factors, reported publicly during the court proceedings, such as Donella discharging her daughter from our care against the advice of Ruby's multidisciplinary team, and her repeated refusal of residential respite offers.

The review has found "no evidence of any deficiency of care provided by NMDHB staff" and this this tragic event could have "happened in any DHB". In my view, the review validates the tireless efforts and expertise of multidisciplinary teams who cared for Ruby over the years.

It does, however, identify recommendations to improve our provision of health services for people with high and complex needs. We have made good progress towards these in the past year, including:

- better information-sharing between primary and secondary health providers (ie, GPs and hospital specialists)
- the establishment of a multi-system team has been established to better support high-needs clients and their families
- a closer relationship with the Ministry of Social Development where newcomers to our region are better supported to find a GP. This is important as new people to our region may be in vulnerable circumstances.
- consumer consultation around our transition to adult care processes and a formal quality improvement project to improve transition

Recommendations have also been made for improvements at the national level.