

PRESS COMPLAINTS COMMISSION

From the Chairman

Madeleine Moon MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

20 February 2008

Dear Ms. Moon,

I thought you might like to see a copy of a statement I have made today, which I have sent to the local and regional press around Bridgend as well as to national newspapers. I am particularly eager to ensure that anyone affected by one of these tragedies is aware of what we can do to help minimise the impact of journalists' inquiries at such a difficult time.

I am also very concerned about the suggestion that the media are somehow glamorising suicide. I understand that you are compiling a dossier to forward to us, and I look forward to receiving it. In addition, members of my staff would be very willing to come to Bridgend to see you, members of the public and anyone who has a professional interest in these matters to answer any questions.

Finally, I should just remind you that our responsibility is for newspapers and magazines in print or online, but not for television and radio, which fall to Ofcom and, where relevant, the BBC.

With kind regards.

Yours sincerely,
Christopher Meyer
Sir Christopher Meyer

CC. Constituency Office, 47 Nolton Street, Bridgend, CF31 3AA

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Sir Christopher Meyer

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Embargo: immediate

20.02.08

**MEYER STATEMENT ON MEDIA AND SOUTH WALES
SUICIDES**

Sir Christopher Meyer, Chairman of the Press Complaints Commission, has outlined how the PCC can help those affected by the press coverage of the recent suicides in South Wales. He said:

“I particularly want to make sure that the relatives and friends of the young people who have died are aware that they are not obliged to speak to the press and that, if they do not want to, the PCC can help prevent unwanted inquiries. We also have a role in dispersing any ‘media scrums’ that may arise outside people’s homes.

“While the press is entitled to report news of unusual or premature deaths, such as suicides, there are rules in the industry’s Code of Practice – under which we take complaints – stating that excessive detail should not be used when reporting the method of suicide, and that publication must be handled sensitively at times of grief and shock. We are ourselves monitoring the situation – but we would urge anyone with examples of articles which in their view are either insensitive or which provide such excessive detail to contact us immediately.

“We are in touch with the South Wales Police and have asked them to pass our details on to any of the relatives who might need our help”.

The PCC’s operates a 24 hour helpline service for those who need assistance in dealing with media attention. The number is 07659 152656. During office hours, the number to use is 020 78310022.

ENDS

Notes:

1. Clause 5 of the Code of Practice says:



- “i) In cases involving personal grief or shock, enquiries and approaches must be made with sympathy and discretion and publication handled sensitively. This should not restrict the right to report legal proceedings, such as inquests.
 - ii) When reporting suicide, care should be taken to avoid excessive detail about the method used.”
2. The PCC has published guidance about what to do if you are being harassed by a journalist. It is available here <http://www.pcc.org.uk/news/index.html?article=Mzg2Mw>.
 3. The PCC is responsible for newspapers and magazines, in print and online. Responsibility for broadcast journalism lies with Ofcom or the BBC.
 4. For more information, contact Stephen Abell on 020 78310022 or 07980 264359.

