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Press Complaints Commission

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Director
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From the Director

12th May 2003

John R Foster Esq
Chairman
South Tees Hospitals NHS Trust
Administration Office
The James Cook University Hospital
Middlesbrough TS4 3BW

Dear Mr. Foster,

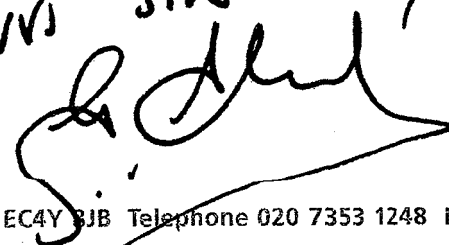
Thank you for your letter of 1st May.

You have raised – rightly – issues that go to the heart of what the PCC is continually seeking to achieve through the system of newspaper self-regulation: the protection of the most vulnerable members of society from unjustifiable and unwarranted intrusion. As you no doubt are aware, there are already tough provisions in the Code to ensure that newspapers respect the privacy of a person in regard to matters of health (Clause 3) and that journalists are especially careful when making enquires, or writing stories, about people in hospital (Clause 9).

Indeed, in regard to the specific case of CJD sufferers, the Commission has been in able, on three occasions, to make clear in formal adjudications its position on the unnecessary naming of patients. And, while it is worth remembering that there will always be legitimate argument about a newspaper's role in reporting such health issues, it is clear that – on the back of such adjudications – such problems have not recurred for some time. For your information, I enclose copies of the relevant adjudications with this letter.

However, it would certainly be useful to talk through some of the issues attendant on such cases and to hear your thoughts as to how greater protection to vulnerable patients may be afforded by the PCC or the industry's Code of Practice. We are currently engaged in a program of regional tours which will, of course, encompass your part of the country. Perhaps when the dates of our visit have been confirmed, we might organise a meeting for either myself or a senior colleague?

In the meantime, if you wish to discuss any of these matters further, do feel free to give me a call. Otherwise, we will be in touch, hopefully, to arrange a meeting in the near future.

Yours sincerely


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