

PCC rules on suicide report in local newspaper

The Press Complaints Commission has today ruled that an article in the Southern Daily Echo did not breach Clause 5 ii (Intrusion into grief or shock) of the Editors' Code of Practice in its reporting of a man who had taken his own life.

The article concerned a man who had died after deliberately inhaling helium. The newspaper - which had based its report on an inquest hearing - had referred to the man having used a 'balloon kit', and had noted that he died after 'inhaling too much' of the gas. The complainant argued that such details constituted 'excessive detail' in breach of the Code and were likely to encourage copycat suicides. The newspaper, however, argued that it was aware of the Code's requirements in this area: it had omitted various details from the inquest hearing such as the precise means by which the gas had been inhaled and the quantity that would generally lead to death, specifically in order to limit the chance of other people copying it.

The Commission ruled that the article did not constitute a breach of the terms of the Code. The newspaper was entitled, it said, to cover the inquest proceedings and report basic information about the method. The level of detail it had included was "suitably limited".

Stephen Abell, Director of the PCC, commented: "The Code makes clear that editors should take care not to publish excessive detail about the method of suicide. The editor, on this occasion, was able to show the care that he had taken. He had removed references that would have provided too much information about how precisely the person concerned had taken his own life. This is what the Code, and the Commission require, so as to reduce the likelihood of copycat suicides."

ENDS

Notes to editors

1. To read the full adjudication click [here](#).
2. The Editors' Code of Practice was amended in 2006 to include the following sub-clause: "When reporting suicide, care should be taken to avoid excessive detail about the method used". The press release announcing the change can be read [here](#).
3. The Code of Practice is written by the Editors' Code of Practice Committee, a separate body which operates independently of the PCC.
4. In 2009, the Editors' Code of Practice Committee issued a guidance note to the industry on the reporting of suicide. This can be accessed [here](#) (see page 41).
5. The PCC has upheld a number of complaints under Clause 5 (ii) of the Code. See for example:
 - Mr and Mrs Marsh v Reading Chronicle
 - PCC v various publications
6. The PCC does a lot of work with bereavement support charities, including those specialising in suicide. It also includes information about PCC cases related to suicide reporting in its regular training sessions for journalists. For more information about this, please contact Will Gore: will.gore@pcc.org.uk
7. For more information about the adjudication, please contact Jonathan Collett on 020 7438 1246 or 07740 896805.

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