

'Stunningly insensitive': NHS bosses sent bill reminder to family after death of Sally Mays

By [Allison Coggan](#) | Posted: October 23, 2015

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INQUEST: Sally Mays.

NHS bosses sent a bill reminder to the family of Sally Mays less than eight weeks after she took her own life when she was turned away from a mental health unit, an inquest heard today.

Humber Foundation Trust wrote to the family reminding them about an outstanding bill left behind following Sally's death after she was turned away from Miranda House by two nurses from its crisis team.

An inquest also heard the trust waited 452 days before issuing a written apology to the family of Sally and appointed the husband of a senior executive to conduct its "serious incident" investigation.

Sally's brother Ben accused the trust of "gamesmanship" as his family tried to uncover details of his sister's death, withholding documents and forcing them to make Freedom of Information requests.

He said: "The trust has played a game with the documentation to the great distress of me and my family – immeasurable distress."

Sally, 22, was found dead in her flat about two hours after she was refused admission and sent away from Miranda House by nurses Paddy McKee and Gemma Pearson, who worked for the trust's crisis team.

On the final day of the inquest, the trust's chief operating officer Teresa Cope read out an "unreserved apology" to Sally's family.

Mrs Cope said: "Sally was not adequately assessed by our staff and was not treated with the level of dignity, respect and compassion we expect of our staff. We let Sally down and we let her family down."

However, Sally's brother Ben pointed out the trust had only issued the written apology to the family two days ago, a week after the inquest at Hull Coroner's Court began and 452 days after his sister was found dead in her flat on Friday, May 25, 2014.

Bridget Dolan, representing Sally's parents Angela and Andy, said the family had been forced to "fight" for important pieces of information throughout the 15 months since Sally's death and were still fighting for the release of crucial documents up until two days ago.

Mrs Cope said the trust had "struggled" with the balance of sharing information, Sally's wish for confidentiality during her life and the need to protect the integrity of human resources and disciplinary matters involving staff.

"I am not suggesting we got it right by any stretch of the imagination," she said.

Ms Dolan said the man originally appointed by the trust to investigate Sally's death was an ex-member of the crisis team and was the husband of a member of the trust's senior team. The inquest heard the Mays discovered the investigator's relationship to the senior executive and complained, with Malcolm Rae then appointed as the independent investigator.

Mrs Cope agreed that "wasn't appropriate" and said she had met Mr and Mrs Mays to apologise.

When asked if she agreed it was "stunningly insensitive" of the trust to send the couple a reminder about a bill for money Sally owed a community fund before her death, Mrs Cope said: "Yes, absolutely" and said all correspondence to bereaved families was now signed off by the chief executive.

Questioning Mrs Cope, Ben Mays said the family had only learned about some of the contentious events surrounding Sally's deaths from the police officers who had tried to persuade the crisis team to admit Sally to hospital because they were so concerned about her distress.

"We have heard a lot about late documentation, insensitive emails and letters," Mr Mays said. "To me, and to my family, it has the appearance of gamesmanship and had it not been for (the police), I have no doubt that the vast majority of what we have heard would not have come to light."

Mrs Cope, who only joined the trust in April, said she was "absolutely convinced" that none of the problems over documents being released to the family was "done with intent."

She said: "I accept we haven't got it right. I absolutely don't accept there was game playing going on. We have made mistakes."

Mrs Cope said the trust had made sweeping changes to policies and practices in the wake of Sally's death. Among the changes were the appointment of a clinical lead nurse, specialising in personality disorders, who worked with the crisis team two days a week, and the strengthening of the procedures where staff can get in touch with an on-call psychiatrist, especially in cases of dispute. Staff had also undergone further training.

A "blue light" alert had also been sent to staff after it emerged Mr McKee had suggested leaving Sally to faint after she tried to strangle herself in front of staff at Miranda House after she learned she would not be admitted to hospital.

However, despite the trust's repeated assurances lessons had been learned, it emerged right at the end of the inquest that the correct procedure following the restraint of Sally at Miranda House and not been followed, nor had that been uncovered during the trust's subsequent investigations.

If correct procedure had been followed, a doctor should have been called to examine Sally. According to the family and their legal team, this presented another "missed opportunity" which could have saved Sally.

Ms Dolan said: "How come nobody in any of these investigations has picked up, investigated and tried to put right the fact that the staff breached restraint policy?"

Mrs Cope said: "I wasn't aware Sally was restrained. We need to go back and look at that. I would need to re-familiarise myself with the details of that investigation."

The coroner is expected to issue his findings later today.