

Sent on behalf of Scottish Head Injury Forum

Neil Gray MSP
Member of the Scottish Parliament and
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care
CabSecHSC@gov.scot



13/02/2025

Dear Mr. Gray,

Re: Addressing the Postcode Lottery in Rehabilitation and Follow-Up Care for Acquired Brain Injury Patients

I am writing to you on behalf of the Scottish Head Injury Forum (SHIF) and to express our deep concern regarding the significant disparities in rehabilitation and follow-up care for individuals with acquired brain injury (ABI) across Scotland. As members of SHIF, we represent a diverse group of professionals, patients, and families who are directly impacted by these inconsistencies, which we believe constitute a postcode lottery in the provision of essential healthcare services.

Acquired brain injury can have devastating and long-lasting effects on individuals and their families. Effective rehabilitation and consistent follow-up care are crucial for improving outcomes and quality of life for those affected. However, our members have observed that access to these vital services varies significantly depending on geographic location. This inequity is not only unfair but also undermines the principles of universal healthcare that Scotland prides itself on.

We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the closure of the Renfrewshire Head Injury Service on June 7, 2024. This service has been a critical lifeline for individuals in our community who have suffered from brain injuries, providing essential support and care that has enabled many to rebuild their lives. The decision to decommission this service, which supported around 80 service users, will have a significant adverse impact on those who rely on it for their care, support, and sense of community. The majority of referrals to this service come via NHS Scotland sites, highlighting its integral role within our healthcare system.

In Scotland, the prevalence of brain injuries is alarmingly high. It is estimated that approximately 300 people per 100,000 population are admitted to hospital each year due to traumatic brain injuries. This statistic underscores the critical need for specialised services like the Renfrewshire Head Injury Service to support these individuals.

Given the severe implications of this closure, we urgently request a meeting with you to discuss potential solutions and explore ways to ensure that those affected continue to receive the support they need. It is imperative that we address this issue promptly to prevent further distress and disruption to the lives of those impacted.

Key Concerns:

- **Inconsistent Access to Services:** Patients in different regions experience varying levels of access to rehabilitation services. While some areas have well-established, multidisciplinary teams and facilities, others lack even basic resources. This disparity means that patients in under-resourced areas are at a significant disadvantage in their recovery journey.
- **Variability in Quality of Care:** The quality of care provided to ABI patients can differ markedly between regions. This includes differences in the availability of specialist therapists, the frequency of follow-up appointments, and the comprehensiveness of care plans. Such variability can lead to suboptimal outcomes for patients who do not receive the level of care they need.
- **Impact on Families and Caregivers:** The postcode lottery not only affects patients but also places an undue burden on families and caregivers. Inconsistent services mean that families in certain areas must travel long distances to access appropriate care, adding to their emotional and financial stress.
- **Long-Term Consequences:** Without equitable access to high-quality rehabilitation and follow-up care, individuals with ABI are at greater risk of long-term disability, reduced independence, and diminished quality of life. This, in turn, places a greater strain on social services and the healthcare system.

We ask that you: -

- **Arrange a Meeting:** Schedule a meeting with representatives from the Scottish Head Injury Forum (SHIF) and other stakeholders to discuss the issues raised and explore potential solutions.
- **Conduct a Review:** Initiate a comprehensive review of the current state of rehabilitation and follow-up care services for acquired brain injury (ABI) patients across Scotland to identify disparities and areas needing improvement.
- **Develop a Strategy:** Formulate a national strategy to ensure equitable access to high-quality rehabilitation and follow-up care for ABI patients, regardless of geographic location or severity of symptoms.
- **Reopen or Replace Services:** Consider reopening the Renfrewshire Head Injury Service or establishing alternative services to ensure continued support for the affected individuals.

- **Monitor and Report Progress:** Establish a system to monitor the implementation of these actions and regularly report on progress to ensure accountability and transparency.

These actions could help address the disparities in rehabilitation and follow-up care for ABI patients and ensure that all individuals receive the support they need to improve their quality of life.

We appreciate your attention to this urgent matter and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Gribben', with a stylized, flowing script.

Paula Gribben
Convenor of SHIF
Scottish Head Injury Forum (SHIF)