

Ed Humpherson,
Director General for Regulation
Office for Statistics Regulation
(By email)

10 January 2018

Dear Ed

In March 2014, Full Fact wrote to you about an issue with unpublished Accident and Emergency statistics being used by Ministers at the Department of Health.

Your response set out the requirements of the code, which stipulate that where a Minister is relying on data provided by another body to make public statements, 'the underlying data should be published at the same time to preserve equality of access to the statistics' [1].

In December 2017, we published a set of factchecks [2] which looked at a wide range of claims made by the Health Secretary Jeremy Hunt and the actor Ralf Little during a high profile Twitter exchange about mental health provision.

During one exchange [3], the Health Secretary said 'We have also seen significant improvements in crisis care including the roll-out of liaison psychiatry to over 90% of A&Es, of which half are 24/7. This may have contributed to a 6% fall in suicide rates.'

For the figures on liaison services, the Health Secretary is referring to a 2016 survey of psychiatric liaison run by academics from Plymouth University in association with NHS England and Health Education England. This survey is not currently published, which the Department of Health confirmed to us in email correspondence. The most recent version of the survey was published in 2015.

We are concerned that the Health Secretary appears to have tweeted unpublished statistics while making public statements about suicide rates. Without access to the statistics he refers to, the public cannot properly scrutinise or assess the validity of the claims.

In your role as Director General for Regulation, I'd be grateful if you could look into the issue outlined and secure the publication of these statistics as soon as possible, to ensure that the public has equitable and transparent access to statistics.

To note, I have also written to Sir David Norgrove regarding another issue with the presentation of mental health statistics by the Health Secretary as part of the Twitter exchange with Mr Little.

Best wishes

Will Moy

[1] https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/emailfromedhumpherson towillmoy19031_tcm97-43701.pdf

[2] <https://fullfact.org/health/mental-health-jeremy-hunt-ralf-little/>

[3] https://twitter.com/Jeremy_Hunt/status/932606635247390720

Will Moy
Director – Full Fact