
Director General for Regulation

Roger Halliday
Chief Statistician and Data Officer
Scottish Government
(By email)

6 December 2018

Dear Roger

Scottish Government Press Release on Hospital Standardised Mortality Ratio Statistics (13 November 2018)

Thank you for your letter of 29 November in response to our concerns about the Ministerial Statement issued on 13 November commenting on the latest Hospital Standardised Mortality Ratio (HSMR) statistics. I appreciate your recognition that appropriate procedures for assuring the contents of this press release were not followed.

I note your conclusion that there was no intention to mislead. However, regardless of the intention, I am concerned that the description of the statistics in the press release was misleading. For example, it attributed credit for the reduction in hospital mortality solely to the Scottish Patient Safety Programme, despite the clear guidance provided by ISD in the statistical release explaining why this is not the case. I understand that the press release was removed from the Scottish Government's website after we notified you of our concerns. Unfortunately, as you are currently transitioning to a new website, a technical error meant that while it was removed from the original website, it remained available on the new version for a longer period (but has since been removed). In light of this, we expect to see a prominent correction to mitigate the risk of misleading the public.

We have raised concerns about previous HSMR press statements.¹ I am sure you share my disappointment that this further intervention has been necessary. The additional steps you are now taking to prevent this happening again are welcome. I encourage your team to work closely with ISD colleagues to ensure those steps are effective.

I am copying this letter to Leslie Evans, Scottish Government Permanent Secretary, and Scott Heald, Head of Profession for Statistics, ISD Scotland.

Your sincerely



Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation

¹ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/ISD-hospital-mortality-Ed-Humpherson-to-Scott-Heald.pdf>