



Wolverhampton Safeguarding Board (WSB) Learning Lessons Briefing – Jim

The Review

This Learning Lessons Briefing note has been authored after a proportionate review into the death of “Jim” in December 2018.

The Wolverhampton Safeguarding Board’s, Safeguarding Adult Review Committee (SARC), requested that a Learning Review Panel be convened in June 2019. The purpose was to consider any key learning themes arising from the information provided by agencies who had supported Jim.

Information was provided by the GP, the Royal Wolverhampton Trust (RWT), City of Wolverhampton Council’s Adult Social Care (ASC), West Midlands Police (WMP) and Black Country Partnership Foundation Trust (BCPFT), all of whom had contact or involvement between October – December 2018.

Scrutiny of actions taken by professionals and agencies, including areas of good practice and key learning themes were considered and reviewed by the Panel.

The Learning Review Panel included the Designated Safeguarding Leads from the following agencies:

RWT, BCPFT, Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) and City of Wolverhampton’s Safeguarding Service.

How you can make a difference

Take some time to think about what these key messages mean for your practice. Ask yourself:

- Can I make changes to my own practice?
- Do I need to seek further support, supervision or training?

Background Summary

Jim was an 83-year-old man, married and living in Wolverhampton. Jim's wife had needed 24-hour support in a care home, until her death in October 2018. Jim had visited his wife daily at the care home, spending most of his day with her. In the weeks following his wife's death, it was recognized that Jim was suffering with adjustment disorder and it is recorded by health professionals supporting him at that time, that he was socially isolated and lonely following his bereavement. In December 2018, very sadly, Jim took his own life.

General Practice

The information provided by the agencies supporting Jim was considered by the Review Panel in some detail. On balance and without hindsight, it was considered that appropriate and proportionate practice, responses and actions were taken by all agencies. The practice was not considered exceptional but was what would legally and reasonably be expected in the circumstances arising from Jim's needs and his presenting situation. Despite agencies' efforts and daily contacts at that time, Jim died of injuries sustained.

Key learning theme arising from the review

Consideration of conversations, connections and actions required to support people holistically with the impact of loss, grief and adjustment disorder

It was considered by the Review Panel, that there was clear recognition by professionals supporting Jim, of the loss he was experiencing and with subsequent adjustments. Jim felt almost instant difficulty adjusting to life without his wife. It was evident that professionals were listening to Jim, supporting him with the effects of adjustment disorder, his responses to grief, associated risks to his mental well-being and the potential and actual physical harm arising from his actions. Regular contacts were provided to Jim in his own home by community health professionals.

The Panel also considered that whilst contacts and conversations are often helpful, professionals should also consider the need for short-term, concrete, practical plans being discussed and acted upon, with people experiencing grief and loss during such contacts. Short term support to sort bills, arrange meals to be delivered and seek out informal support from family and friends to help with the immediate sense of despair and anxiety should not be underestimated. Discussing what would be helpful and possible in the short and medium term might help a person to start to visualise what the future might start to look like, with a sense of purpose and eventually fulfilment.

The focus on whether the person needs an informal hospital admission or has eligible needs for a care home admission should not be the only considerations – professionals should always consider what is the impact of the immediate emotional needs of a person, what is the impact upon their physical and mental well-being and how that can be supported in the community, holistically? This could include ways to meet emotional, physical and practical support needs in the short-term whilst having a conversation about medium term plans as part of a broader and longer-term “risk management plan” – if appropriate.

Any assessment or conversation with a person suffering loss and grief, should be undertaken at the pace and with consideration given to the needs of the person. The Panel considered it crucial for professionals not to underestimate the need to use all their communication skills, emotional intelligence and professional curiosity to establish plans with the person, when appropriate to do so.

This may include plans for the medium term. This recommendation is made after the Panel considered how Jim may have been feeling complete despair about what his sense of purpose would now be each day? The need to talk about taking next steps, making practical plans to achieve new outcomes might be an important consideration for a person’s mental and emotional well-being in their grieving process.

Recommendations

- That any professional supporting a person experiencing loss or grief should discuss and consider informal support and networks available to assist a person, as part of a wider support plan. Putting people in touch with support and networks within the local community, re-connecting a person with family or friends where contacts have been lost or neglected, should form part of the support to be called upon, to manage adjustments associated with loss. As such, ‘making helpful’ connections should be included in conversations with people experiencing loss and grief, and part of the plan for managing associated risks
- That the immediate and short-term effects of loss upon a persons’ emotional and physical wellbeing is considered with as much importance as a person’s ability to undertake practical and physical tasks. The emotional needs of a person and the impact upon their well-being should never be underestimated
- That practical support with bills, making financial and practical arrangements like ensuring meals are available – are arranged where it is considered necessary and appropriate in the short-term. When appropriate to do so, medium- and longer-term plans could provide a focus on small, next steps to managing change