

**Southern Health Board**  
**Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General**

This report has been prepared pursuant to Section 6(4) of the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act, 1993.

**Patients' Property Accounts**

The Board administers the funds held on behalf of patients in the Board's hospitals. These accounts are mainly in respect of moneys belonging to long stay psychiatric and geriatric patients. The moneys held by the Board on behalf of patients at 31 December 1995 totalled £1.86m, of which

- £1.806m related to balances due to patients, £237,081 being in respect of dormant accounts i.e. discharged / deceased patients
- £56,617 represented the accumulated interest from the investment of funds held on behalf of patients.

The Board has implemented patients' property regulations covering the operation of these accounts which are maintained in 22 of the Board's institutions. Provision is made within these regulations for the administration of such property generally and in particular for

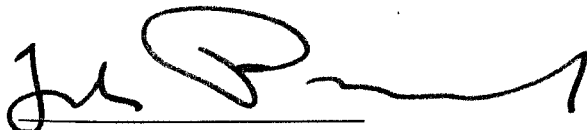
- official books of account / records to be maintained
- the receipt and custody of patient property
- the independent audit of the accounts
- procedures to be followed up when patients are discharged / deceased.

While the regulations covered situations where a claim is made by relatives of deceased patients, there is no specific requirement therein for notifying the next of kin or legal representatives of the existence of such property.

In response to my inquiries I was informed that where a relation of a patient wishes to take care of the patients' property or a patient is personally in a position to do so, the Board will facilitate this in every way possible. Where this option is not availed of and the Board holds property on behalf of patients its policy is to make every effort to trace the next of kin of deceased patients. This includes writing to the next of kin informing them of the balance on the account. Any funds remaining, after providing for funeral expenses are paid over to the next of kin following receipt of a signed Letter of Indemnity, or in cases where there is a large amount, a Grant of Probate or a Letter of Administration. All enquiries by patients or their next of kin regarding balances on their accounts are dealt with immediately by the hospital concerned.

Funds belonging to former patients, not yet claimed, are held within the Patients' Property Accounts and the Board has no plans to change this arrangement at the present time.

I also asked whether the annual charge (£150,000 in 1995) accurately reflects the costs of administering these funds. I was informed that the charge levied by the Board on Patients' Property Accounts does not accurately reflect the costs of administering the funds. The administration fee of £150,000 charged in 1995 was mainly in respect of clerical input. The true cost would be higher if the input of nursing staff were taken into account.



**John Purcell**  
**Comptroller and Auditor General**  
**6 March 1997**