

By email to Dr Gregor Smith, Chief Medical Officer

16 April 2024

Dear Dr Smith,

Last October, during the Speak Up Week, we wrote to you to outline our concerns regarding the policy in NHS Scotland whereby the sex marker in CHI numbers could be changed to reflect a patient's "gender identity".

We attach both our original letter and the woefully inadequate reply from the Digital Health and Care Policy Team who spectacularly missed all the pertinent points we raised and, worryingly, outlined that further confusion was being considered with the possible introduction of a "non-binary" number.

In the Cass Report published last week, Dr Cass also expressed grave disquiet with the practice of changing NHS numbers in the service in England and Wales: Recommendation 28 says "The NHS and the Department of Health and Social Care needs to review the process and circumstances of changing NHS numbers and find solutions to address the clinical and research implications."

The reason for this recommendation as spelt out in the report (in paragraphs 161-162) is that changing NHS numbers "has implications for safeguarding and clinical management of these children and young people and could affect longer-term health management (for example, the screening they are offered).

"From a research perspective, the issuing of new NHS numbers makes it more difficult to identify the long-term outcomes for a patient population for whom the evidence base is currently weak."

Cass goes on to highlight that "The Review has also heard a series of accounts of children and young people at safeguarding risk being lost to follow up and / or of young people presenting to the emergency department with a safeguarding history that staff were unaware of because of changes of name and NHS number." (10.46)

The report more than vindicates the concerns we raised with you in October last year, and makes it even more concerning that NHS Scotland did not address or engage with this serious failure. We trust that, in light of Dr Cass's findings, this will now be prioritised in order to ensure patient safety now and in the future.

Yours,

Trina Budge, Marion Calder, Susan Smith
Directors, For Women Scotland