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STRATEGIC PLAN

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FOREWORD

As a reader of this strategy, it is likely that you are familiar with, and support, the work we do. If you are new to AvMA, then you should know that we are the only charity in the UK dedicated to supporting people including their families (in which we include loved ones) who have suffered avoidable harm because of medical errors or accidents. (For ease of reading, we use 'medical harm' to cover both in this document.)

We share this strategy in unprecedented and uncertain times. Not since the founding of the NHS in 1948 have there been greater challenges for the healthcare system in the UK, borne of several factors and compounded by the aftereffects of the COVID-19 pandemic. NHS waiting lists are at record length, there are workforce pressures, staff shortages and issues of low morale.

Recorded patient-safety incidents remain stubbornly high as do the number of avoidable deaths. The reasons for this are more involved than just human error. Modern healthcare is highly complex involving, as it does, the interaction of people, technology, equipment and systems. It can also be high risk. Furthermore, there can be cultural issues including healthcare providers prioritising the management of organisational reputation over the harmed person's needs.

Part of our role is to make sure that this continuing high level of incidents does not become normalised within the UK healthcare sector. Our campaigning work is, in part, a reminder that this should not be accepted and then resolved (reluctantly) by way of after-the-event compensation. It is also a reminder that investment in the NHS and its workforce is critical, because without a well-motivated and well-led workforce, supported by the right systems and infrastructure, patient safety incident numbers will not decrease.

There has been a long-standing pattern of legal reforms and consequential impact on those trying to secure fair compensation. These reforms have increasingly made it harder for people to obtain funding for any litigation considered necessary. Such legal action may be needed to secure a remedy to the harm a person has encountered, along with the consequences that arise from this, which, in the most extreme cases, may include the need for long-term care.

It would be remiss of us not to acknowledge these external factors when preparing our strategy for the next five years – a timeframe we believe is the minimum needed to deliver the goals to which we aspire. In so doing, we have had to think very hard about how we can, with comparatively limited resources, make the most impact for those we need to serve including those we currently do not reach.

At the same time, we need to be ambitious, and so we have set out a vision of what we want for those who have been harmed, namely that they get the support and outcomes they need. What the remedy is for each individual person will vary; one size does not fit all. Likewise, what constitutes support is very personal and can be undermined if the healthcare provider does not handle the medical harm (or related negligence claim) in a way that is supportive, understanding, timely and restorative¹ in practice.

Our vision is supported by four objectives where we set out our ambition, what we aim to do, and what success for us looks like over the period of this five-year plan.

We recognise, of course, that we cannot achieve this on our own. Without the support and goodwill of the many people and organisations with whom we already work so closely, we cannot begin to deliver the success to which we aspire. We hope, whoever you are or whichever organisation you represent, that you will join in supporting us to achieve our objectives and, in so doing, give everyone the confidence they should expect to have in their healthcare provider. This is the bedrock of a modern healthcare system: when it makes a mistake, it quickly acknowledges it and puts it right so that confidence is restored.

¹ Restorative practices are ways of working with conflict that place the focus on repairing the harm that has been done.

WHO WE ARE

We are the only charity in the UK that exists to directly advise, help and support people who have been harmed by an avoidable medical incident.

- Since our creation in 1982, we have supported and helped over 100,000 people through a variety of channels including our helpline and website.
- Our helpline is open five days a week and takes around 2,050 calls a year.
- We provide tailored advice to around 500-600 people a year who report incidents to us, so that they can get answers and a meaningful outcome following avoidable harm.
- We work to inform public debate about avoidable medical harm and campaign to reduce it.
- We work with government and regulators to influence policy that may impact patient safety and access to justice for those who have been avoidably harmed.
- We rely on the generosity of supporters to provide our services: we receive no government funding.
- We are a strong team of committed staff aided by over 100 volunteers who provide dedicated support on our helpline.

100,000

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2,050

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OUR VISION, MISSION AND VALUES

Vision

People who suffer avoidable medical harm get the support and outcomes they need.

Mission

We champion the needs of people adversely impacted by avoidable medical harm. We do this by supporting and empowering them to secure the outcomes they need, including healing for any related physical or psychological harm(s). We use what we learn from the people we support, alongside our expertise, to seek improvements to medico-legal practices through system learning and change.

VALUES

Our behaviours will be driven by:

Integrity

We are honest and act in accordance with our values. We conduct ourselves in an open and professional way and form our views independently, recognising our primary role is to assist those who have been avoidably medically harmed.

Independence

We advocate for, and stand alongside, people affected by avoidable medical harm while always recognising that in every complaint and dispute there are two sides that need to be considered. We are objective and keep ourselves free from outside influences.

Fairness

We treat all people fairly and with dignity. We do not shy away from speaking up where we see injustices.

Collaboration

We work with those we support, campaign groups and charities, healthcare professionals, government, lawyers and dispute-resolution bodies to bring about change and improvements for patients who have been avoidably harmed. We are proactive in trying to reach organisations and groups that support under-represented and marginalised communities that may require our dedicated expertise.

Empathy and compassion

We work with people who have been avoidably harmed and their families, listening and making sure we do all we can to understand the harm they have suffered and its impacts, and support them in achieving the outcomes they are needing.

OVERVIEW OF OUR STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES 2024-29

Building on our vision and mission in the context of the challenges we believe people are likely to face over the coming years, these are our strategic objectives:

Objective one: to expand the range of communities we serve to enable more people experiencing avoidable medical harm to access services from us that meet their needs.

We aim to expand our reach, recognising that there is a clear link between healthcare inequalities and patient safety. We aim to be proactive in developing plans to ensure our services are tailored to the needs of the widest range of communities. We will proactively seek partners who can support us in ensuring our services meet the diverse needs of people who may require our support as well as being inclusive in how we deliver those services.

Objective two: to empower more people to secure the outcomes they need following an incident of avoidable medical harm while providing caring and compassionate support.

When things go wrong, we aim to make sure more people feel supported and empowered to secure an outcome that meets their needs. We recognise that litigation is neither necessary nor appropriate in every situation of avoidable harm and, where appropriate, we will seek to use alternative and more informal means to achieve the resolution or outcomes that people are seeking. In delivering our services, we recognise that people need compassion and caring support given the trauma that can arise from an adverse medical incident.

Objective three: to eliminate compounded harm² following avoidable medical harm.

Too often, we see people who have suffered compounded harm due to the way they have been treated following avoidable medical harm. There is some common ground and understanding between the different groups and bodies involved about healthcare patient and family engagement practices that should take place to avoid compounded harm. We aim to improve these practices by developing plans to support healthcare providers with the restorative practices and guidance they need to ensure they do not cause additional harm.

Objective four: to have the necessary diversity of sustainable resources and capacities to deliver this strategy.

To deliver our strategy, we require sufficient resources on a sustainable footing: we need a diversity of funding sources and income, ensuring we are not overly reliant on any one source. And our staff and volunteers - a vital asset - need to be engaged, motivated and provided with the right tools and development opportunities so that they can meet the changing needs of those we support. Our staff need to be supported, too, as the work they do can be challenging and, at times, emotionally charged.

In the following pages we set out these objectives in further detail.

² Compounded harm is the additional harm suffered by patients and their families due to the inappropriate response of healthcare organisations.

OBJECTIVE ONE

To expand the range of communities we serve to enable more people experiencing avoidable medical harm to access services from us that meet their needs.

WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE:

- People understand the mechanisms for raising concerns about avoidable medical harm and face no barriers in raising those concerns.
- People can find, without difficulty, an independent advocate or lawyer with the relevant expertise and experience. And given the specialist nature of clinical negligence law, the chosen lawyer is accredited by an independent body, such as AvMA, and is willing and able to represent them.
- Where people need to attend a coroner's inquest, they have access to the same level of legal support as the healthcare provider, and there is meaningful learning from inquests both locally and nationally.

WE WILL:

- Develop an outreach programme and work with those communities and groups who experience avoidable medical harm and who presently are under-represented as users of our services. Through closer collaboration, we will improve our understanding of, and ability to respond to, all those we support including those we do not reach currently.
- Tailor and adjust how we deliver our services (where possible) to ensure they meet people's needs where they do not already do so.
- Develop our website and related resources to make us as accessible as possible.
- Identify signposting arrangements with other advice agencies and bodies that can act as a referral point to AvMA to make sure everyone in need of our services is correctly referred to us.

- Partner with other groups, advice agencies, organisations and charities that work with disadvantaged communities to facilitate delivery of our services to their communities. We will use our campaigning resources to support the reduction of healthcare inequalities, recognising the wider link to patient-safety issues.
- Develop our ability to collect and analyse data about people who use our services, refine our insight, and improve our impact and reach. We will also encourage the healthcare system to collect and share better demographic data about patients' feedback, complaints and safety incidents.

SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE THIS:

- Governments in all four UK nations have agreed to fund independent advocacy services in healthcare to support people who have been avoidably harmed and thus secure the remedies to which they are entitled.
- We have reached and supported more people who have experienced avoidable medical harm.
- We have seen a significant increase in people from a diverse range of backgrounds and communities using our services.
- The diversity of users of our services better reflects the inequalities that are known to exist amongst a range of communities of users of healthcare services in the UK.
- We have strong relationships with a variety of healthcare partners particularly those who represent under-represented people.
- The key advice bodies in the UK know about AvMA, understand what we do and make appropriate referrals to us.

OBJECTIVE TWO

To empower more people to secure the outcomes they need following an incident of avoidable medical harm while providing caring and compassionate support.

WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE:

- Arrangements are in place for people who have been avoidably harmed to be supported by independent advocates - this right to be drawn to their attention by healthcare providers.
- People who believe they have been avoidably harmed are empowered and feel confident in securing their rights and know what to do if they feel dissatisfied.
- People have access to advocacy support when using healthcare-provider complaint processes, and where they need to escalate their complaint to the Health Ombudsman for NHS England (or equivalent bodies for the other UK nations), they are not met with unnecessary barriers for independent review.
- The healthcare system ceases to take a defensive position following avoidable harm and is willing to take responsibility and meet the needs of patients and their families.

- Learning from healthcare investigations and inquiries is actioned to provide greater understanding of how things go wrong and improve patient safety.
- A National Oversight Mechanism of coroners' Prevention of Future Death report recommendations is established, to improve patient safety.

WE WILL:

- Review our services to ensure they are as effective as possible in helping people secure the outcomes they need.
- Actively engage in campaigns to achieve positive systems change for people who have been avoidably harmed in healthcare.
- Continue to campaign with other bodies for independent advocates to support people who have been avoidably harmed.

- Recognising that complaints are not always effective, partner with others to bring about improvements to processes that will help people secure the outcomes they need, including any redress.
- Continue to work with other bodies to secure representation that more evenly matches other parties in inquests, as well as a National Oversight Mechanism for coroners' Prevention of Future Death reports.
- Continue to build collaborative relationships with NHS Resolution and other indemnity schemes, as well as claimant- and defendant lawyers, to make the litigation process as straightforward as possible for claimants, and to help facilitate greater learning for healthcare providers thereby facilitating improvements.

SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE THIS:

- People are using informal dispute-resolution processes, such as complaints policies, to resolve their incidents of harm where their complaint may also involve a low-value claim that would have hitherto been litigated.
- A National Oversight Mechanism is in place to scrutinise and report on the collective outcomes of coroners' Prevention of Future Death reports.
- NHS complaint processes have been improved with clear escalation stages for reviews.
- Healthcare providers' investigation processes provide learning, answers and accountability. Actions are taken to give greater understanding of how things go wrong and how to improve patient safety.

OBJECTIVE THREE

To eliminate compounded harm following avoidable medical harm.

WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE:

- The potential for compounded harm is fully understood by healthcare providers.
- Healthcare providers and their staff take on board, and adopt, good restorative practices and have clearly defined processes for supporting people who have been avoidably harmed as well as supporting staff when also impacted.
- Healthcare and legal professionals focus their efforts on supporting patients and their families while being open and transparent when avoidable accidents occur thus minimising compounded harm and enhancing healthcare providers' reputations in the longer term.
- Legal professionals who defend healthcare providers do so in a consistent, ethical manner and do not resort to practices that compound the harm for patients and their families.

WE WILL:

- Continue to develop with others guidance on restorative practices designed to assist healthcare providers in adopting best practices.
- Support the rollout of such guidance to healthcare providers, collect data on the difference it makes, and encourage healthcare regulators to recognise it as good practice.
- Work with NHS Resolution, other indemnity bodies and legal professional bodies to drive out of the litigation-process approaches and tactics that compound harm.

SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE THIS:

- Healthcare providers are willingly developing and sharing best restorative practices in supporting people who they avoidably harm, and people in these processes report positive outcomes from the experience.
- Regulators and professional bodies recognise the importance of restorative practices and promote their use for those who have been avoidably harmed.
- Healthcare providers recognise behaviours that can compound harm and take action to eliminate them.

OBJECTIVE FOUR

To have the necessary diversity of sustainable resources and capacities to deliver this strategy.

WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE:

- We are financially strong with a range of repeatable and diverse income sources that can support the delivery of our work over the longer term.
- Our staff and volunteers have the capacity for, and are supported and engaged in, the work we do and have access to the training and development they require to meet the changing needs of those we support.
- Our systems and processes have the necessary investment to ensure they are fit for purpose and can support our staff to deliver efficient and effective services to those we support.
- We have a fundraising and legacy programme that helps our financial plans.

WE WILL:

- Produce a plan to have diverse streams of income to support our work and meet the needs of those we support.
- Review our staff structure, reward and remuneration arrangements to ensure they are fit for the future, and that, with staff and volunteers, we have the capacity to meet our objectives.
- Develop a digital-communications strategy and invest in a new online presence, including website and social media.
- Develop our fundraising and corporate-giving programmes to meet the expectations of our donors.
- Continue to support, engage and develop our volunteers' programme (including from amongst those we support) while they, in turn, continue to support and complement the work we do.
- Have infrastructure arrangements that meet the needs of our organisation.

SUCCESS WILL LOOK LIKE THIS:

- Significant, repeatable income by year five of this plan comes from new sources that complement today's income streams.
- Our staff policies for remuneration and reward are reviewed and periodically updated in line with good practice.
- We have a digital-communications strategy and a new website.
- We have an active programme of fundraising, corporate sponsorship and legacy giving that aids our financial sustainability.

WE CAN'T DO IT ALONE

Join us on a journey to transform trust in healthcare and enhance it overall by significantly reducing the financial and human costs resulting from unsafe practices. We rely on the generous support and help of everyone connected and dedicated to patient safety and justice

We need to raise money to deliver our plans, and we want you to join us in helping us do so.

Your contributions are crucial. Here is how you can help:

- **Donate.** Your financial support directly funds initiatives that enhance patient safety and promote justice.
- **Spread the Word.** Share our goals with your community to broaden our impact.
- **Advocate.** Speak up for our cause and help amplify the voices that need to be heard.

By supporting us you join a movement committed to safety, fairness and dignity. Together, we can ensure that the healthcare system works safely and fairly for everyone, and people who suffer avoidable medical harm get the support and the outcomes they need. Let's make every voice count.

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