

Nadine Dorries MP  
Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health

cc. Rosena Allin-Khan MP, Shadow Minister for Mental Health,  
Sir Ian Diamond, National Statistician,  
Louis Appleby, Chair of National Suicide Prevention Strategy

27 October 2020

Dear Minister,

We are writing to you as Minister for Patient Safety, Suicide Prevention and Mental Health to draw your attention to an important issue.

At present, national data for the UK does not include ethnicity of people who have died by suicide. We believe that it is crucial to have accurate data as the rates of black, Asian and ethnic minorities are anecdotally higher but we need information. Asylum seekers, a vulnerable group with higher rates of mental illness and other risk factors for suicide, also cannot be identified from national data on suicides. Although ethnicity data are captured at many points of contact with the NHS, it is not recorded on death certificates and is not included in the data returned to the Office for National Statistics by Coroners investigating suicides at inquest. Coroners include information such as the country of birth and occupation of a suicide, but cannot include ethnicity unless the ONS requires it. The ONS, as a government body, would require government direction to add this request to the data Coroners are asked to return.

At present, although we know ethnicity can affect access to healthcare, detention under the Mental Health Act, and health outcomes, and there are rightly a number of suicide prevention programmes to try to reduce the numbers of suicides, we have no way of discovering how effective such programmes are for those of different ethnicity. Attached to this letter you will see a copy of an editorial published today in the British Medical Journal calling for this change- to record ethnicity and refugee or asylum seeker status in suicides- and providing more details on the rationale and urgency for this. We will be happy to have a further detailed conversation on this topic at your convenience if you so desire.

We urge you to lead on bringing about this change as a matter of urgency so that the ONS make this change in data collection.

Many thanks for your very kind attention.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Juliet Cohen, Head of Doctors at Freedom from Torture  
Professor Cornelius Katona, Medical Director Helen Bamber Foundation  
Professor Dinesh Bhugra, Emeritus Professor