

NHS trust admits guilt over death of teenager

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An NHS trust has admitted failings that led to the “entirely preventable” death of an epileptic teenager who drowned in a bath while in its care.

Southern Health NHS Foundation Trust said that it was “truly sorry” about the death of Connor Sparrowhawk, 18, who had epilepsy, autism and learning difficulties.

He was in the care of the trust when he drowned in July 2013 after suffering a seizure while taking an unsupervised bath at Slade House, a care and assessment unit in Oxford. The unit has since closed.

Southern accepted full responsibility after an inquest ruled that neglect had contributed to Sparrowhawk’s death. The trust pleaded guilty to breaching health and safety law at Banbury magistrates’ court.

In a statement after the hearing, Julie Dawes, interim chief executive of the Southern Health Trust, said: “Connor’s death whilst under our care was entirely preventable and today we have pleaded guilty to the charges brought against the trust by the Health and Safety Executive.

“Connor’s loss continues to have a

The trust said it let down Connor Sparrowhawk, who drowned in a bath



devastating impact on his family and we are truly sorry that we didn’t keep him safe. The effect of Connor’s death has been far-reaching and whilst it in no way compensates for the loss his family has suffered, it has led to significant changes and improvements in the trust.”

Last month, a Medical Practitioners Tribunal Service hearing into Sparrowhawk’s death found that Valerie Murphy, the lead clinician responsible for his care, had failed to conduct risk assessments on him before he took the bath. She now faces being struck off.

An independent inquiry into the trust, commissioned by NHS England after Sparrowhawk’s death, found that over four years it had failed to properly look into the deaths of 1,454 patients with mental health problems or learning disabilities.

The audit criticised the trust for a failure of leadership and accused senior managers of not investigating and learning from deaths.

The trust will be sentenced at Oxford crown court next month.