

Nurse is arrested on suspicion of poisoning patients in stroke ward

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A nurse has been arrested on suspicion of poisoning patients on the stroke unit at a hospital in Blackpool.

The woman has been suspended and bailed until December 6. The nursing standards watchdog said that it was "urgently considering" whether to take action.

Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS foundation trust contacted Lancashire police this month after a member of staff raised concerns.

The nurse, who worked at Blackpool Victoria Hospital, was arrested "on suspicion of administering any poison or noxious thing with the intent to injure and [cause] ill treatment or wilful neglect", the police force said. A source close to the investigation said that the arrest was related to the "incorrect administration of drugs". It is not

known whether this is linked to patients potentially being given too many drugs or the wrong kind. Detectives believe that the alleged poisoning took place over weeks rather than months. The case has not been linked to any deaths.

Detective Chief Inspector Jill Johnston said: "This arrest is part of an ongoing investigation into allegations of mistreatment of patients by a healthcare professional at Blackpool Victoria Hospital. The inquiry is complicated and we have a team of specialist detectives working on this case who are also offering support to those families who have had loved ones identified as potentially being involved.

"Our priority and the priority of Blackpool Teaching Hospitals NHS foundation trust is to ensure the safety of patients. We are working closely with the trust as part of the investigation."

A spokesman for the Nursing and Midwifery Council said: "We can con-

firm that we have received a referral and we are urgently considering whether we need to take any sort of interim action."

Staff at the hospital were stunned to hear of the allegations yesterday. "Anyone doing something like this is going against everything we stand for," said one staff member, who asked not to be named.

Another nurse said outside the hospital: "I haven't been told a thing about this and no one I have spoken to seems to know anything either. But it is not surprising given the size of the hospital. It's like a city in there."

Patients and relatives also expressed surprise. Carole Prince, whose husband, Pete, was recently discharged after spending three months on the stroke unit, said: "He had quite good care when he was on the ward. It was all great care from the nurses.

"I was quite shocked when I heard about the arrest because we have not

had any bad care. I don't really know what's gone on. It's all in the hands of the police."

Wendy Swift, chief executive of the hospital trust, said: "We can confirm a healthcare professional has been suspended in line with trust policy following allegations of mistreatment against patients on the stroke unit.

"We take all allegations of this type extremely seriously and when the concerns were raised we immediately contacted the police. The trust is working with the police and co-operating fully with their investigation.

"We would like to reassure all our patients that all necessary actions are being taken. The hospital remains a safe and caring environment for patients and the provision of services will continue as usual."

The Care Quality Commission said that the trust required improvement after an inspection this time last year, which included the stroke ward.

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