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What Do We Mean by Martha's Rule?

The NHS has announced the rollout of 'Martha's Rule' in hospitals across England from April, enabling patients and families to seek an urgent review if their condition deteriorates.

The patient safety initiative is set to be rolled out to at least 100 NHS sites and will give patients and their families round-the-clock access to a rapid review from an independent critical care team if they are worried about their or a loved one's condition.

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Why Martha's Rule?

Thirteen-year-old Martha Mills died from sepsis at King's College Hospital, London, in 2021, due to a failure to escalate her to intensive care and after her family's concerns about her deteriorating condition were not responded to promptly.

Extensive campaigning by her parents Merope and Paul, supported by the cross-party think tank, has seen widespread support for a single system that allows patients or their families to trigger an urgent clinical review from a different team in the hospital if the patient's condition is rapidly worsening and they feel they are not getting the care they need.

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Martha's parents, said:

We believe Martha's Rule will save lives. In cases of deterioration, families and carers by the bedside can be aware of changes busy clinicians can't; their knowledge should be recognised as a resource. We also look to Martha's Rule to alter medical culture: to give patients a little more power, to encourage listening on the part of medical professionals, and to normalise the idea that even the grandest of doctors should welcome being challenged.

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Take home points

- Listen to parents, they know their child best. Record their concerns and give equal weight to their observations of their child's condition.
- Ensure a clear pathway is in place for parents to raise any concerns about their child's condition.
- Give parents a voice and empower them to challenge and raise concerns.



Martha's Rule

New Paediatric Early Warning System PEWS

The introduction of Martha's Rule comes alongside other measures to improve the identification of deterioration, including the rollout last November of a new early warning system for staff treating children.

While many hospitals already have similar systems in place, this change will provide a single, national standardised process for patients, families, and staff to have a clear way of ensuring issues are detected and escalated quickly.

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How will Martha's Law be implemented?

Evaluation of the initial roll-out from at least 100 trust sites during 2024/25 will inform proposals for Martha's Rule to be expanded further across all acute hospitals, subject to government funding. NHS teams will also identify ways to roll out an adapted Martha's Rule model across other settings, including community and mental health

NHS chief executive, Amanda Pritchard, said:

Hearing about the heartbreaking loss of Martha and the experiences of her family has had a major impact for people right across the country, with parents, patients and NHS staff welcoming her parents' call for a simple process to escalate concerns when they can see a loved one's condition worsening.

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Suffolk Safeguarding Partnership