

PCC censures The News (Portsmouth) for suicide report

The Press Complaints Commission has today upheld a complaint against The News (Portsmouth) for publishing an article which contained excessive detail about the way that a woman had taken her own life, in breach of Clause 5 (Intrusion into grief or shock) of the Editors' Code of Practice. The article reported the suicide of the complainant's mother, based on information obtained at the inquest. Following the woman's death, her handbag had been found to contain pill packets for a set number of a named anti-depressant. It went on to report the precise quantity of pills that were missing and the dosage she had ingested. There was also a reference to the amount of alcohol found in her blood.

Although newspapers are entitled to report inquests, they must take account of the requirements of the Code. In this case, the Commission ruled that the combination of the name of the anti-depressant, the number of pills missing from the packet and the post-mortem result showing the level of drug's in the woman's system was "sufficient information to spell out to readers the precise method of death". This was therefore "excessive detail" in breach of Clause 5 (ii) of the Code and the complaint was upheld as a result.

Further concerns that the newspaper had not handled publication sensitively at a time of grief and shock were not upheld.

The adjudication was published in the newspaper today. To read the text, please [click here](#).

PCC Director Stephen Abell commented: *"The Code makes clear that "care should be taken to avoid excessive detail about the method used" when reporting suicides, because of the risk of copycat actions. This adjudication builds on the Commission's case law in this area and sets out the high standards the PCC expects of editors when reporting such a sensitive subject"*.

ENDS

For further information, please contact Jonathan Collett on 020 7831 0022 or 07740 896805.

Notes to editors

1. The Editors' Code of Practice was changed in 2006 to incorporate a new sub-Clause (5 (ii)), which reads: "When reporting suicide, care should be taken to avoid excessive detail about the method used". See [here](#) for more information.
2. The Editors' Code of Practice Committee has published guidance to journalists on suicide reporting. This can be read [here](#) (see page 41).

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