Dear Ms McKelvie

Call for Views on Destitution and Asylum in Scotland

In response to your letters dated 31 January and 10 February 2017, NHS Fife has little experience of issues relating to Asylum seekers and access to healthcare.

NHS Fife is an active contributor to recent Syrian refugees being housed in Fife, and have worked with our partners to ensure access to healthcare

‘As a public service provider, what support are you able to provide to asylum seekers and what are the main barriers to providing support?’

Asylum Seekers are entitled to free Primary Care Services.

Difficulties may arise and therefore possibly destitution as a result of asylum seekers are not being granted refugee status, as this will limited their ability to access welfare support.

At times, we are aware of families living in Fife who we are unable to identify as ‘refugees’ or ‘asylum seekers’, however those individuals and families have accessed health services using Accident and Emergency or Out of hours as their first point of contact. Health care has therefore been provided and a CHI number generated.

Difficulties can often relate to the identification of patients, for example, sometimes they have no formal identification papers such as passport etc or no fixed abode.

Women coming to Scotland seeking asylum and refugee status, or who have been trafficked, are at increased risk of having experienced all forms of gender based violence (GBV), including domestic and sexual abuse.
NHS Fife is a partner of the Fife Violence Against Women Partnership and contributes to strategic plans for GVB services in Fife. We benefit from having a SHAKTI support worker who specifically supports women from ethnic minority groups experiencing GBV and links to other specialist and statutory services locally.

Some women can be offered refuge locally with Fife Womens Aid or through local homeless services. There are currently close interagency working relationships and information sharing processes which ensure support can be well co-ordinated. Shakti Womens Aid provide invaluable support to both service users and practitioners regarding the specific and complex issues relating to immigration status.

NHS Fife staff may have limited experience and or knowledge regarding these issues, however advice and information is available through contact with the GBV Nurse Advisor, Equalities and Human Rights lead and guidance published on the NHS Fife intranet.

‘We’d also like to hear about how a person’s need for support is assessed and what would make this assessment process easier, please make reference to any policies and procedures within your organisation’.

Further work is required for us to be able to identify patients with asylum status. This would be helpful for us so we can support the registration process with a local GP-including the provision of support for language and translation. It would be helpful to know when asylum seekers were coming to live in Fife so we can prepare and can put in place arrangements for them to have CHI numbers if not already allocated. And how they are arriving to be housed locally, for example are they already involved in a program or with services within another health board?

Guidance for General Practice relating to patients who require to be registered with a practice would be helpful i.e. ensuring that, if required, visits are made to the home, a translator is booked and health assessments are done to ensure protection and promotion of health and public health in the wider sense. And that local Health Visiting Team and School Nursing Services are made aware of any health needs.

National Immunisations programming should consider additional guidance for Health Boards in relation to asylum seekers children, who may not be in school and therefore routinely immunised.

National screening programs could consider alternative delivery modes so that asylum seekers that move between health boards receive opportunity for screening and are able to receive their results.

‘If your area does not have experience of asylum seekers, it would be helpful to know what polices, guidance or procedures are in place or being developed to address support for asylum seekers?’

NHS Fife staff would contact NHS Fife lead for Equality and Human rights to seek advice or further information and support, sign post patients to the Carers Information Point and sign post asylum seekers to Fife Council services. Staff may also sign post to the ‘Fife Centre for Equalities’ which is a partner in our Equality work and a local Third Sector Equality organisation.
Informative accessible information made by and with the community commences wider work to improve patient knowledge and awareness of services—thereby improving appropriate use of and access to health. NHS Fife is currently exploring further tailored information for asylum seekers/refugees which aims to help them understand how to access health services. This will be based on the developments currently underway with Gypsy Travellers in Fife to co-create patient information about Out of Hours and Urgent care services.

Yours sincerely

[Signature]

Paul Hawkins  
Chief Executive