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COMMENT Worcester News

It's a painful lesson for all concerned

THE ordeal endured by farmer Craig Walsh may or may not be the tip of a health iceberg, but whatever the

circumstances, the implications are nevertheless rather worrying.

Mr Walsh slipped and fell on his spine earlier this month. Despite being rushed to hospital, he was told he had suffered soft tissue damage and sent home. However, the pain became worse, and he found himself back at accident and emergency where he was told he had a urine infection. It was only after he received a private consultation at Worcester's South Bank hospital that it emerged Mr Walsh had broken his back.

So. It's another hospital blunder which is once again explained away by the predictably bland textbook response from an NHS spokesman. This really isn't good enough.

Only a few weeks ago, this newspaper reported that hospitals across Worcestershire were seeking to shed more than 700 frontline jobs. There were assurances that health provision would not be compromised. But even the least cynical of people could be forgiven for linking cuts with reduced levels of service. Everyone knows that when staff levels are reduced, then mistakes will inevitably occur – whether it is the public or private sector, increased pressures on staff always widen margins of error.

These factors may or may not lie behind the disturbing case of Mr Walsh's wrong diagnoses, but it is difficult to rule out a link – at least in the minds of the public. Health chiefs must learn from this lesson.

Worcester: Man left in agony with fractured vertebrae hospital didn't diagnose Docs said I had infection but my back was broken

A MAN was left in agony for weeks after doctors at Worcestershire Royal Hospital failed to spot he had a fractured back.

Craig Walsh shipped and fell on his spine in the early hours of Friday, May 5, and was taken to accident and emergency by ambulance.

After a 13-hour wait and a series of CAT scans and X-rays he was told he had suffered soft tissue damage, given painkillers and tranquilisers and sent home.

But the pain got worse for the 57-year-old farmer of Lucies Farm, Colletts Green, and on Thursday, May 11, he was back at A&E, where he was told he had a urine infection, given antibiotics and referred to a urologist at the Alexandra Hospital in Redditch.

Mr Walsh - whose farm hit the Worcester News headlines in November 2005 when it was revealed his kurobuta pigs swim in the family's indoor pool and his cows get massaged daily with Japanese rice wine - then decided to get a second opinion from a private urologist at BUPA South Bank in Bath Road, a private hospital.

But when he requested copies of his CAT scans and X-rays from the Royal he was told that he would have to wait up to 40 days for them.

Eventually, a urological problem was ruled out at South Bank, new scans were taken, and the fracture of Mr Walsh's vertebra was found on May 23.

Mr Walsh said: "It is not at all clear how the NHS missed finding this fracture of my back. I understand that if a

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special corset had been fitted on May 5 it would have greatly eased my back pain. But instead of resting I was sent to Redditch for urological tests, misdiagnosed and given antibiotics and medication for problems that I didn't have.

"I was also horrified that the NHS wanted 40 days to give me copies of my test results, which caused me unnecessary grief and suffering. I have since been told by a very helpful radiologist that protocol in his department is just five days for the likes of me who needed the documents for ongoing healthcare."

A spokesman for Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust said: "Mr Walsh has raised several issues and although he is not happy with some of the responses he is appreciative and also grateful for the help that he received from one of our radiologists, whom he describes as a 'true gentleman'.

"Mr Walsh has written to the chief executive and has requested copies of his X-rays, which he has received and his medical records which will be sent to him in accordance with the procedures required by the Data Protection Act 1998.

"Mr Walsh has not as yet made a formal complaint but when we receive this we will deal with his concerns expeditiously and sympathetically and respond to him directly."

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Craig Walsh, who was sent home with painkillers when he had a fractured vertebrae. 23871801