System aids communication between professionals
Health and social care services in Hampshire – including the county council, two hospitals, the ambulance service and two GP out-of-hours services – have implemented CP-IS.

Kim Jones, designated nurse for safeguarding children in two clinical commissioning groups in Hampshire, says: ‘CP-IS really does aid that communication between professionals which has been identified so often in serious case reviews.

‘It is really good at making sure those children who are vulnerable have better protection.’

Children at Risk
When sharing data saves lives
A system that triggers safeguarding alerts when at-risk children attend emergency departments is being adopted by the NHS and social workers

So brutal were Ayeeshia-Jayne Smith’s injuries, they were described as being of the kind normally seen after a car crash.

But the child had not been killed in a road accident, she was murdered by her mother. AJ, as she was known, was not yet two years old when she died, with her injuries including heart laceration.

Last year, Kathryn Smith, of Burton, Staffordshire, was jailed for 19 years for her daughter’s murder. Her partner Matthew Rigby was jailed for three and a half years for allowing the death of a child.

In the recent serious case review, which takes place after a child dies or is seriously injured and abuse or neglect are thought to be involved, it emerged AJ was seen multiple times in unscheduled care settings in the months leading up to her death on 1 May 2014.

The review found that social workers and health professionals had shown a ‘lack of professional curiosity’ in the face of signs that the child was in danger.

The report said: ‘Emergency department and paediatric staff did not sufficiently consider whether child abuse or neglect was a possibility when AJ presented with medical issues during the last few months of her life.’

It added that social workers did not appear to see AJ as their primary client, and they judged the parenting she received to be ‘good enough’ even while the risk to her from her mother was increasing.

A complete picture
Caron Swinscoe, senior clinical lead for nursing at NHS Digital, which provides information and IT systems for health and social care, believes an information-sharing system that is now being adopted by agencies in England would have helped alert healthcare staff to the danger AJ was in.

‘I’m convinced it would have made a difference,’ Ms Swinscoe tells Nursing Standard. ‘It offers a more complete picture of a child.’

NHS Digital is leading the nationwide implementation of the Child Protection – Information Sharing (CP-IS) system for local authorities and healthcare organisations in England. The system can help identify at-risk children who might have been taken to hospital outside their local authority area to avoid detection of abuse or neglect.

When a child attends an unscheduled care setting, such as an emergency department or a minor injuries unit, CP-IS allows staff quickly to identify whether he or she is on a child protection plan or has ‘looked-after’ status. If either is the case:

» The health team is alerted and can access social care team contact information.

» The social care team is automatically notified the child has attended a healthcare setting.

» Both parties can see details of the child’s previous visits to unscheduled care settings anywhere in England in the past year.

Ms Swinscoe says the system is the first of its kind in England and is now included in the standard contract for NHS unscheduled care providers.

During her short life, AJ was the subject of child protection plans, supervision and care orders, and in 2013 spent months in foster
How good are the safeguarding systems at your workplace? Join the debate at rcni.com/safeguarding-alerts

March 2018 is the deadline for 45% of unscheduled care settings and 65% of local authorities to start using CP-IS

49 serious case reviews were published in 2016, according to the NSPCC

1,200 unscheduled healthcare settings and 80 local authorities in England don’t use the CP-IS system yet

Ayeeshia-Jayne Smith was subject to care orders and seen in hospital on multiple occasions

'...care. However, the serious case review found Queen’s Hospital in Burton, to which AJ had been brought in the months leading to her death, was not proactive in finding out whether the child was known to statutory services. This meant a hospital admission was not reported to AJ’s social worker.

Cross-boundary issue

The review recommended Derbyshire and Staffordshire local authorities and healthcare partners implement the CP-IS system.

There was no cross-boundary information sharing between the local authority in Derbyshire, which was responsible for AJ, and Queen’s Hospital in Staffordshire, where she was taken on several occasions, including the day she died.

Burton Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust chief nurse Paula Gardner says CP-IS will soon be implemented by the trust’s hospitals, initially in the emergency department in early 2018.

'We have a duty to ensure all young people are adequately protected and the trust will continue to look at ways to enhance this safeguarding process.'

A spokesperson for Derbyshire County Council says it will install the system in 2018. ‘Our discussions with NHS Digital and other local authorities, health providers and clinical commissioning groups to establish CP-IS across Derbyshire are well advanced,’ he said.

Low uptake

Although almost half of the 152 local authorities in England are now using CP-IS, only 227 out of 1,200 unscheduled healthcare settings, including emergency departments, walk-in centres and NHS 111, use it. A project board that includes NHS England, NHS Digital and others has set implementation targets to address this.

‘At the centre of this we have vulnerable children,’ says Ms Swinscoe. ‘We have a national system to help protect them and help clinicians to understand which children are under protection.’

She urges safeguarding nurses to start work with CP-IS now, and stresses that the tool is free of charge and can take as little as six weeks to put in place.

‘There is no reason to wait for other local authorities or trusts to implement, NHS Digital can help support you.’

Ayeeshia-Jayne Smith was subject to care orders and seen in hospital on multiple occasions