

PATIENTS' FORUM

FOR THE LONDON AMBULANCE SERVICE

Eight Minutes? *

Annual Report of the Patients' Forum: December 2003 - March 2004

Rosie Winterton, *Minister of State for Health*, said on 12th November 2003:

"I stress that the new Patients' Forums will be the real engine of the new patient involvement arrangements. We want them to be the local drivers for change and over time to make a real difference to the way that local health services are provided."

What is a Patients' Forum?

There is a Patients' Forum for every National Health Service Acute Trust and Primary Care Trust in England. Our members are local people who have Statutory powers to enter NHS premises and obtain the information we need to monitor health services. Forums play a key role in health-related decision-making within the areas they monitor. The Patients' Forum for the London Ambulance Service monitors all LAS activities in London.

What Does the Patients' Forum Do?

Forums raise awareness of the needs and views of patients and the public, placing them at the centre of health services decision-making. We have a number of primary roles, which include:

- Obtaining views of local people about their NHS Trust
- Liaising with local authority Overview and Scrutiny Committees or other bodies we believe appropriate e.g. local coroners
- Monitoring day-to-day delivery of ambulance services
- Influencing the design of, and access to, LAS services
- Providing advice and information to patients and their carers about services.

How is the Patients' Forum Supported?

By Forum Support Organisations (FSOs) which are paid by the Commission for Patient and Public Involvement in Health (CPPIH) to support Forums. CEMVO provides our Forum support and is contract-managed by the London Regional Office of CPPIH.

FSOs are supposed to service the Forum by providing administrative and development support by:

- Supporting the training of Forum members
- Helping PPI Forums communicate with each other

- Arranging for information and guidance provided by CPPIH to be made available to Forum members
- Helping Forums monitor NHS services and preparing reports for members
- Assisting Forums to play an active role in changing health policy and services to meet the needs of patients.

The Role of CPPIH

CPPIH is supposed to provide the Patients' Forum with all the resources they need to carry out their statutory duties. These include:

- Staff
- Funding
- Office Accommodation
- Assisting Forums to shape patients' services
- Monitoring the work of FSOs
- Supporting the Independence of Patients' Forums
- Ensure that Forum members have the training they need to carry out their statutory duties

How Well Have Things Worked Out?

Forum members have been grossly dissatisfied with the services provided by both CEMVO and the CPPIH. The key problems have been:

- Failure to provide the staff required by Forum members to carry out their duties
- Failure to provide computers and equipment to members
- Failure to provide an office for the use of the Forum members
- Failure to provide appropriate training
- Failure to place any resources whatsoever in the hands of Forum members
- Failure to appoint sufficient numbers of members; we have had only six Forum members to cover the whole of London since December 2003
- Persistent problems with paying expenses.

The Forum's Key Priorities for London:

The Patients' Forum has worked on many issues during its first few months. These have included:

- Ambulance queuing outside A & E Departments
- Traffic calming measures
- Diversity issues
- Drink culture and its effects on LAS operations
- Terrorist alerts
- Visits to strategically placed ambulance services
- Developing links with local ambulance crews
- Spending time with operational crews
- Developing a model public involvement project in liaison with the Camden ambulance station.

Scrutiny of the LAS by the Greater London Authority and Association of London Government

The Forum was invited to give evidence to the panel scrutinising the effectiveness of the LAS. We raised with them problems of the resourcing of the Forum and asked them to make representation to the Department of Health to get resources to enable the Forum to adequately monitor ambulance services across London. Ken Livingstone eventually wrote to the Secretary of State for Health (John Reid) after a request from Darren Johnson, Green Party Assembly Member. A response is still awaited.

Meetings with LAS

The Forum attends meetings of the LAS including the LAS Trust Board, Patient and Public Involvement Committee, and the Research Committee.

The LAS Trust

The members of the Patients' Forum acknowledge the excellent co-operation we have received from the London Ambulance Service NHS Trust, managers and front line staff. Our many demands

on the Trust have been responded to with enthusiasm and openness. Together, we will strive to deliver ambulance services of the highest quality, fit for the many millions of people who live, work and die in London.

Why Not Adopt an Ambulance Station?

We invite you to adopt your local ambulance station to help improve the service for local communities. Are ambulance services obstructed; what support can the community give their local ambulance station; does the position of the station cause a nuisance; are the ambulances able to park without causing a danger to local residents? If you are interested in becoming involved with us on this project, please email

info@patientsforumlas.org.uk

The Patients' Forum for the LAS needs YOUR help!

Over seven million people live in the area covered by the LAS and hundreds of thousands of workers and visitors come to London every day. The Patients' Forum has only six members. We need to be better resourced and to have at least 15 members to carry out our Statutory duties effectively. It is essential that we recruit at least nine more members urgently. New members will have to be interviewed and complete two days training. To download application forms go to <http://www.patientsforumlas.org.uk> or write to CPPIH, 163 Eversholt Street, London NW1 1BU. Telephone: 020 7788 4900.

And there's more

For additional information about the Patients' Forum for the London Ambulance Service go to our website:

<http://www.patientsforumlas.org.uk>

For general enquiries email:

info@patientsforumlas.org.uk



The members of the Patients' Forum are (from left to right):

Malcolm Alexander (north London), Mary Arayo (south London), F John Britt (north-west London), Vishy Harihara (north London), William G Marks (north London), Lena Wanford (east London).