**Brief Notes of the London Ambulance Service Board Meeting held on 24th March, 2015**

I attended this meeting at a last minute request from Malcolm, who needed to attend an NHS England mental health safety meeting held at the same time.  It was an interesting and generally positive meeting -  with several directors missing, some new staff present and various other attendees included  a reporter from the Evening Standard and 2 paramedics working on special projects.

Richard Hunt (Chair) spoke about recent meetings he had attended. These included  London  NHS Chairs Meeting and the  National Ambulance Chairs meeting - and these were good opportunities to share issues and developments.  Other ambulance services were experiencing similar stresses, but London the most so. One of Richard’s objectives was to sit in on other Ambulance Service Board meetings to compare, contrast and learn.   He noted the worrying difficulty of adequate LAS staffing and  the 3 year horizon to put things on a better footing.  He also wanted to get the message that LAS was about openness and transparency.

Fergus Cass raised issues of diversity of the workforce and the role of community involvment officers - looking towards a workforce more representative of London’s population. Zoe Packman spoke about initiatives to further enhance safety, staff education and patient safety.  She noted PRFs are currently being reviewed with mental health becoming more clearly an important quality driver.  It was noted there are now 3 full time equivalent mental health nurses  available.  Integrated performance graphs are being amended and to some extent simplified to make them more useful, better understood, more able to compare, use of more ratios, new risk report in the summary, staff engagement,  borough based outputs, etc.  This all seemed very complicated but the thrust is to measure better what needs measuring, where the risks are, progress and deficits, and a generally more holistic and more nearly up to date picture of the service. In previous meetings I felt there was more of a box ticking, rubber stamping sort of approach and this seemed more the understanding of the real world and what is needed to shape it towards agreed objectives.

Equipment - more purchased during the last 2 months; more time will be focused on logistics and be more complex biased.

Staffing - Staff morale had become LAS’s greatest concern.  Mark Gammage had prepared a shortened version of an action plan being discussed and developed by an Executive Team. This was a long and lively discussion.  Fergus noted we had been here before - why was this different?  Answer: LAS has the worst staff survery  results ever and the worst of all ambulance services - plus seriously hemoraging staff.  It was stated that there needed to be a major cultural change within LAS to address these vital problems.

Key issues:

1. Appraisal
2. Team Talk
3. Recruitment
4. Individual performance management
5. Equality and Inclusion

It was noted that a fairly low rate of staff survey responses existed - and Mark suggested some staff felt why bother? if no changes were being made, or no one obviously listening.  (When I once spoke to a couple of paramedics this is exactly what I was told - why bother? Nobody listens or cares!)   Staff morale is to be considered a job for all staff - not just HR.

Richard noted key messages: Listening informs what we do.

People (front line and support) really appreciate efforts to listen and improve.

He would like to create an organisation where people want to come to work  for it; they want to stay working there; they want to return if they are away for a time. After considerable discussion the Board agreed a line in the sand should be drawn and staff morale is the top priority from now on.

Mark Gammage’s  report for the Board is also  on line -  containing a variety of strategies to achieve morale and retention objectives - including restructuring, training, appraisals, etc. I had the impression that the out of Country recruitment would lessen and the aim would be to attract local candidates for the majority of longer term staffing needs.  Karen Broughton seems to have taken over HR responsibilities internally and is working closely with Mark.

Many more topics were raised and to some extent discussed and the relevant papers are on the LAS website.  I found the meeting task focused, positive and constructive - in contrast to some previous experiences.  I was especially pleased that the staff are being put  in centre place as staff are any organisation’s greatest resource and the vast majority of front line staff do what they do because they want to make a positive difference to people’s health and welfare.

Kathy West, Patients’ Forum Executive Committee

26th March 2015