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A&E Patients and the Winter Crisis

Dear Keith, we are very concerned about the pressures on London's acute services caused by the closure of A&E department in west London, and the underfunding of acute hospitals and A&E services. Closure of A&E departments over the past few years appears to have had the inevitable effect of ensuring that sick people wait appalling lengths of time for treatment.

Imagine an elderly person falling in their home and being unable to get up, and then waiting hours for an ambulance, and then queuing outside an A&E department for up to an hour, and then laying in a cubicle in A&E for 4 hours before discharge or admission - 8 hours of queuing to get a bed or get home.

Surely, NHS England is responsible and accountable for these delays because they have closed services and have failed to deal with the ambulance queuing outside some of our major hospital which has gone on for years.

Commissioners have failed deal adequately with the crisis as the following figures for October 2015 and 2014 show:

Patients waiting in an ambulance for up to an hour outside casualty in October 2015 - compared to November 2014:

Hillingdon Hospital 210 (222 in 2014)
Northwick Park 342 (326)
Queens 244 (355)
North Middlesex 213 (205)

Ealing 180 (221)

Not only are patients who are seriously ill waiting in ambulances for admission to A&E, but the ambulances and their highly trained crews are stuck in queues and can't get away to attend to the next patient suffering from stroke or cardiac arrest. Delays can cause serious harm to seriously ill patients.

We believe that NHS England must accept responsibility for a failure in the provision and organisation of emergency and urgent care.

What action will NHS England now take to ensure that the resources that London needs to get rid of ambulance queues and inappropriate patient waits are made available immediately?

Malcolm Alexander

Chair

Patients' Forum – Ambulance Services - London