

PATIENTS' FORUM

FOR THE LONDON AMBULANCE SERVICE

The Rt Hon Earl Howe
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Quality
Department of Health
Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London, SW1A 2NS.

January 14th 2015

Dear Lord Howe,

The Patients' Forum has been monitoring emergency and urgent care activity in London for some time and we are very concerned about the current situation faced by patients needing these services.

The pressures on ambulance service are now so great that we believe there will be a crisis for patients who become seriously ill if we are hit by a harsh winter. In London, we believe the problem is partly caused by the closure of A&E departments and beds and is compounded through the cutting of social services, failure to advertise 111 and urgent care centres, and because many GPs are unable to meet local need. The Better Care Fund and the Prime Minister's Challenge Fund will help to some degree, but will not deal with a crisis this winter.

Queuing of ambulance outside of A&E departments is not only intolerable for patient waiting in ambulance and trolley queues to be transferred to a cubicle, but as a result of these queues thousands of sick people are waiting even longer for emergency care. The data that follows is obtained from the commissioners for ambulance services in London and shows that each month thousands of people are queuing to get into A&E:

PATIENTS WAITING BETWEEN 30-59 MIN FOR TRANSFER TO AN A&E CUBICLE IN DECEMBER 2014

Barnet Hospital	197
Ealing Hospital	322
Hillingdon Hospital	251
Northwick Park Hospital	475
Princess Royal University Hospital	391
Royal Free Hospital	217
Queens Hospital	636
Queen Elizabeth Hospital (Woolwich)	151
St George's Hospital	531
Whipps Cross University Hospital	302
West Middlesex University Hospital	207
North Middlesex University Hospital	454
St Mary's Hospital, Paddington	273

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111 services provide good advice and urgent care centres provide excellent care, but most people don't know about these services and NHS England has failed to launch its national campaign to inform people about these services. We have been asking them for the past 6 months to launch these services and their 'snail's pace' approach, is one of the important factors in the current unsatisfactory and potentially hazardous situation.

Ambulance staff are under intolerable 100% pressure at the moment. Long shifts, staff shortages, no lunch breaks and relentless pressure to keep people out of A&E. They are at the edge of a precipice, and although staff are being recruited from Australia, this is a short term solution. We urgently need active recruitment of paramedics from our inner cities – we can't rely upon recently graduated Australian paramedics in the long term.

We believe you need to require the NHS to take the following action now if we are to avert a crisis:

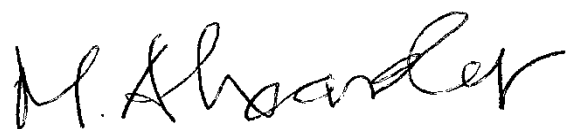
- Immediately launch a 111 advertising campaign
- Expand GP practices and extend working hours
- Stop all A&E closures
- Open more beds to stop ambulance queuing
- Ensure social care funding is meeting the needs of vulnerable patient in order to keep them out of A&E
- Ensure emergency staff can afford to live in the cities where they provide care
- Ensure active fully funded recruitment of paramedics and other front line emergency care staff

Patients often feel they are being blamed for the current situation. In practice delay in getting adequate primary care is leading to patients' health deteriorating and many consequently go to A&E or call an ambulance to secure the medical care they need.

Can you please look at our recommendations? They are all practical and will transform the current situation if acted on quickly

I look forward to receiving your response.

Very best wishes



Malcolm Alexander
Chair
Patients' Forum for London Ambulance Service

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