

Capital's sickest patients face longest waits in the country for an ambulance

Ross Lydall and
Nicholas Cecil

LONDON Ambulance Service is continuing to miss key NHS targets of reaching critically ill patients in time, figures revealed today.

It delivered the worst performance in the country for the fourth month in a row for the most serious "Red 1" calls, such as cardiac arrest patients who are not breathing and do not have a pulse.

In the latest sign of the soaring pressure on the NHS, 64.3 per cent of these emergencies were reached within eight minutes in November. The target is 75 per cent.

Although this was marginally better than the 64.1 per cent recorded in the capital in October, the LAS saw its performance for the eight-minute "Red 2" category – which covers conditions such as stroke and fits – drop from 57.5 per cent to 55 per cent.

The November figures show that the LAS responded to 1,228 "Red 1" calls and 40,760 "Red 2" calls. Nine out of 10 of these received a response within 19 minutes.

LAS bosses have been forced to reduce the number of emergency calls that automatically receive an ambulance because of chronic staff shortages and soaring demand.

The service is receiving the greatest number of 999 calls in its history – about 35,000 a week. Some patients with non-life-threatening injuries, such as cyclists hurt after falling from their bike, are now having to wait several hours for a response as emergency crews are diverted elsewhere. Figures

published today by NHS England showed that performance across the country's 10 ambulance trusts generally deteriorated, with Red 1 responses averaging 71.8 per cent and Red 2 falling to 68.4 per cent.

However, the performance is likely to have been hampered by the decision of ambulance workers to join a national strike over pay, which saw them walk out for four hours on November 24 and work to rule for the rest of the week.

Heidi Alexander, Labour MP for Lewisham East, challenged David Cameron at Prime Minister's Questions yesterday over ambulance delays in the capital.

"Nearly half of all London ambulances called out to critical cases do not arrive within their target eight-minute response time," she said. "Is that what the Prime Minister had in mind when he told us that the NHS would be 'safe in his hands?'"

Mr Cameron said that the London Ambulance Service had been provided with an extra £15 million and that 400 staff members had been hired by the London Ambulance Service after a national and international recruitment campaign. Paramedics from Australia and New Zealand are due to start work later this month.

Separate figures also published today showed no evidence of patients suffering clinically as a result of the delays, suggesting that LAS call handlers are targeting resources to the most sick.

In London, the percentage of the 332 cardiac arrest patients treated in August who were discharged alive from hospital rose to 9.3 per cent, one of the best survival rates in the country.

Jason Killens, LAS director of opera-



"Agony": Bridget Forde, a former carer, fell and broke her hip at home in Muswell Hill. It was five hours before paramedics came

'She was the kind of person who would always help others. But she was treated like an animal'

Daughter's grief as ex-nurse, 92, dies of pneumonia after 14 hours in A&E

THE daughter of a pensioner who died of pneumonia after waiting five hours for an ambulance and another 14 hours in a London A&E unit today blamed the worst NHS "crisis" in a decade.

Bridget Forde, 92, drifted in and out of consciousness after falling and breaking her hip at home in Muswell Hill last month, as her daughter Helen dialled 999 on four occasions.

It was five hours before paramedics arrived. Six days later the former nurse and carer died of pneumonia, having waited a further 14 hours in A&E at the Whittington hospital, in Archway, before being admitted to a ward.

Ms Forde, 63, said: "The last memory I have of my mother is her lying on that

floor in agony. She lived here for 50 years and was the kind of person who would always help others. But when she needed help she was treated like an animal. It is clear the NHS is in crisis and it's time the political point-scoring and finger-pointing stopped."

Whittington hospital expressed its sincere condolences, adding: "We are currently experiencing high demand for our services. We endeavoured to make Ms Forde as comfortable as possible in A&E, and kept her under close and regular observation."

A London Ambulance Service spokesman said: "We were extremely busy and are very sorry for the delay."

David Churchill

tions, said: "From April 1 to December 31, 2014, we reached 75 per cent of the most seriously ill and injured patients in under 11 minutes.

"We also we reached 95 per cent of the most seriously ill and injured patients in under 20 minutes.

"However, every year demand

increases. We have received over 100,000 more calls in 2014 than 2013."

Rosamund Urwin Page 15

Have your say:
standard.co.uk/a&e