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Patient who told 999 he had rare disease dies after waiting 5 hours for ambulance

Ross Lydall Health Editor

A PATIENT who told 999 call-handlers he had a potentially fatal illness died after waiting almost five hours for an ambulance, the Standard can reveal.

London Ambulance Service admitted the man had to wait longer than expected because of high demand during winter. At the time it was receiving more than 250 calls an hour.

The man, who has not been identified, had called 999 at 2.09pm on a Sunday last December while suffering severe abdominal pain and vomiting.

He told the call-handler that he had Addison's disease, a rare condition of the adrenal glands that prevents production of essential hormones.

When an ambulance failed to arrive, he made a second 999 call at 6.44pm, saying he was struggling to breathe and had fallen over. The call was upgraded and an ambulance arrived 19 minutes later, at 7.03pm — four hours 54 minutes after his first 999 call.

The crew called for "urgent assistance" and two additional crews were needed to get him down stairs. He arrived in hospital at 8.31pm. After surgery for a perforated bowel he was admitted to intensive care but died 10 days later.

An investigation found his initial call was correctly rated as "category three", meaning it was not life-threatening or serious, and a response was due within two hours. However, a 90-minute call-back to check on his condition did not happen because the call centre was so busy. The investigation found a call-back "may have identified the patient's deteriorating condition". About 8,400

LIST OF FAILINGS

OTHER serious incidents reported last month included:

- An ambulance carrying a heart-attack patient was wrongly directed to a local hospital rather than a specialist centre. During the 20-minute delay the patient had a cardiac arrest and died.

- An ambulance took 73 minutes to be dispatched despite a hospital repeatedly asking for a patient who had had a stroke to be transferred to a specialist unit. The patient died later that week.

- A call about a patient with breathing problems was wrongly categorised as lower priority. A medic arrived after 16 minutes to find the patient in cardiac arrest. They were dead on arrival at hospital.

- A patient found collapsed and in cardiac arrest was not given a defibrillator shock for 10 minutes because of a "deficit of experience/knowledge" in the first paramedic on the scene. The patient died.

people in the UK have Addison's disease. Many need daily medication.

Patricia Bain, chief quality officer at LAS, said: "We have apologised to the family of this patient for the time it took to reach them."

Details of the case emerged today as LAS published details of eight serious incidents reported to health commissioners last month.