



Update following the Health Scrutiny Panel Report into Patient Transport Services to James Cook University Hospital

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The review of Patient Transport Services (PTS) undertaken by the North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) was concluded in September 2008. It highlighted a number of areas in which PTS could be improved. As well as working to improve services internally it highlighted that NEAS work with partners in the health, social care and wider transport economy to improve the service. We have now moved into the PTS Transformation phase and recommendations of the review are being put into place.

The review identified four customer groups (patients, commissioners, hospitals and taxpayers) and it became clear during the process of the review that many customers do not understand what PTS actually is. Therefore work is required to inform our customers of what service they actually receive when purchasing PTS from NEAS. A stakeholder event for commissioners and hospitals has been arranged for Monday 2 March 2009 to launch this work. At the forefront of the work that is being undertaken are the principles of Right Patient, Right Resource, Right Place, Right Time, First Time, ensuring quality and safety at all times.

The HSC report questioned how NEAS ensures that patient views are incorporated into the development of the services we provide. A patient survey is undertaken annually and the recent results indicate that we have a patient satisfaction rate of 97% which is exceptionally high. The final report is being quality assured at present but will be made available to the HSC once it has completed this process. The survey format and frequency is being reviewed and we are also keen to explore further means of gathering patient views to develop services, especially around specialist services. To this end we are considering the use of focus groups and expert patients.

As mentioned in our initial response to the report NEAS is pursuing Foundation Trust status and will be seeking members of the public, including service users, to become members and governors of the Trust. We see this as an important and valuable step towards ensuring that the views of the communities we serve are embedded in our service delivery and strategic planning.

As detailed in our initial response to the report NEAS is supportive of a single booking service for PTS within Teesside. The service review highlighted the

challenges that low quality inputs place on our planning and service delivery. The PCT run Transport Information Service provides a booking service for patients in Teesside and applies eligibility criteria developed in conjunction with NEAS. However, we have some concerns about the quality of the bookings received via this service. We are aware, as we deliver training on our on-line booking service, that there is a high staff turnover and this obviously makes it difficult to maintain consistency of the service. Our planning staff regularly deal with the consequences of incomplete booking information and spend considerable time correcting this whilst our patient transport staff deal with the outcome of incorrect booking information. Unfortunately this often results in inappropriate vehicles being sent to collect patients resulting multiple resources being sent and, at times, patients arriving late for appointments or even not being able to attend the appointment at all. Consequently we are keen to work with the PCT to improve this service. NEAS currently provides a very successful booking service for residents of Northumberland and feel that we have the expertise to either provide a similar service to Teesside or to help improve the existing service. We also currently provide an online booking service to hospital wards and departments across the North East and this service is supported by our Customer Care Service.

NEAS was aware of failings regarding particular, regular service users and prior to conclusion of the review was undertaking work to address the needs of renal dialysis patients in Teesside. Previously these patients were solely transported by taxis and whilst this was responsive there were concerns about the quality of the service. Working with our staff to redesign rotas and local community transport providers Future Regeneration of Grangetown (FROG) and Wheels of Freedom (WoF) we are piloting a service to improve the service to patients; trying to transport patients in a timely manner with a high quality and caring service without additional cost to the taxpayer. We are aware that further work is required to continue to improve and refine the service.

Further work has been completed to extend the times of the services offered to hospitals in Teesside. We now have a 0700 – 1900 service able to carry everything from walking to stretcher patients operating out of Coulby Newham, Carlin Howe, Redcar and Stockton. We are also in discussions with JCUH regarding the provision of a dedicated discharge vehicle to assist timely discharge of patients from hospital.

NHS County Durham has recently completed a tendering exercise for Urgent Care transport and NEAS was successful in winning this contract due to be fully implemented in April 2009. Whilst this is unlikely to affect JCUH it will enable North Tees and Hartlepool hospitals to provide transport home from A&E for patients resident in County Durham and Darlington.

NEAS also has updated planning software and mobile tracking and dispatch information operational in a test system (operating on two test vehicles). This is

planned to be fully operational in County Durham at the end of March and will then be rapidly rolled out across the Trust with a target date of mid-May for comprehensive implementation.

NEAS management staff within Teesside meet with PCT and Hospital Trusts on a regular basis, however, as a result of the review an engagement strategy is being developed which will ensure that there is regular, formal and structured communication between NEAS and hospitals at an operational and tactical level. At a strategic level, it is envisaged that the meetings will be an opportunity for PCT, hospital and NEAS representatives to meet together to ensure that strategic direction and development is fully supported and fits with the vision of each organisation.

In an attempt to improve the efficiency of the service delivered NEAS has negotiated with hospitals in Teesside and agreement has been reached to introduce a banding time system for transportation of patients. This will allow NEAS to increase the number of patients transported on vehicles, reducing mileage and wasted capacity. This will also help us to reduce our carbon emissions.

In order to further enhance the communications between Hospital Trust and NEAS a change notification process has been put in place. This is essential to ensure that the transport implications of hospital developments are adequately considered and resourced in sufficient time for changes to be implemented.

Our Customer Care Service provides a vital link to wards, departments and patients. Each hospital has an identified Customer Care Officer and is supported by our Customer Care Team. The Customer Care Officers are available to provide support in person or by telephone and are often involved in solving individual specialist transport requirements, dealing with on the day problems and complaints and in identifying service developments and improvements.

During the process of the review management knowledge and skill gaps were identified relating to PTS. As a consequence we have a manager who is currently dedicated to the patient transport service and have encouraged knowledge transfer across the Trust. Staff development is planned for first line, supervisory management and future training needs will continue to be identified and addressed.

New management information reports have been developed to support decisions about service provision improvement. At present these are not widely available as we are in the process of ensuring that the quality of our data, on which these reports are based, is as high as possible. This work is planned to be complete by the end of March 2009.

Whilst we acknowledge that there is still work to be undertaken to improve patient transport services we feel that significant steps have already been taken. The end

point of the PTS Transformation project (planned for March 2010) is to reach a stage where continuous improvement is embedded in the service, ensuring that the service stays at the forefront of developments and innovation. NEAS sees the current patient transport service transforming over the next five years into a fully integrated demand responsive transport service with its roots in the principles of Right Patient, Right Resource, Right Place, Right Time, First Time, ensuring quality and safety at all times.