

PRESS RELEASE

Embargo until 12 noon Monday 9 June 2014

Patient Transport Service failing local people

Patient Transport in Greater Manchester is failing vulnerable people and leading to poor quality care, according to a survey by a local health watchdog.

The news comes following a survey of nearly 575 patients throughout Greater Manchester by the Greater Manchester Healthwatch Network.

The research found that time keeping is a major problem with the service, provided by Arriva Transport Solutions, with half of patients saying that they did not get to their appointment on time and in Oldham and Stockport over 65% of patients said the service got them to their appointment late. In the Tameside area, which reported the lowest level of late arrivals, 37% were still late for their appointment. Many reported that this late arrival led to missing appointments or having their medical care adversely affected.

Large numbers of patients also said that they waited in excess of 90 minutes before they were taken home following their appointment. For patients, when combined with a delay in getting to their appointment this can make a short medical appointment turn into a very long day away from home.

Shockingly, one patient reported that they spent nearly nine hours from beginning to end, including 5 hours overall waiting for their transport to and from the hospital, arriving nearly 2 hours late for their appointment and getting home close to 8pm in the evening.

Peter Denton, speaking for the Greater Manchester Healthwatch network said:

“Timing of journeys must be our biggest concern with the Patient Transport Service. Two thirds of patients said they were more than 30 minutes late for their appointments and we heard of several instances where patients were so late that their important medical appointment didn’t go ahead or their treatment had to be cut short.

“Not only is this worrying in terms of the patients’ health outcomes but it can also lead to a waste of NHS resources as hospitals and clinics try to rearrange activity around patients who arrive late, through no fault of their own.

“Although many people told us that they had experienced difficulties with this service, it is important for us to recognise that the vast majority also said that the front line staff they dealt with were very good.

“We are calling on Arriva and the commissioners of this service to make improvements so that our local populations receive the good quality, safe and worry-free service they are entitled to.”

In addition to issues with timeliness, over half of patients said they didn't know where to get information about the Patient Transport Service, meaning that many vulnerable people who are eligible for the service are unlikely to know about it.

The research also found communication to be a common problem with patients reporting poor communication in terms of booking, journey planning, having the right accessible vehicle available and not knowing how to complain.

ENDS

For more information contact:

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We will endeavor to make people available for interview and comment if you contact us between 8.30am and 12 noon on Monday 9 June.

Notes to Editors

1. The Patient Transport Service is provided by the NHS to ensure that people who (for medical/health related) cannot travel independently to medical appointments are able to get to and from those appointments. It is sometimes also referred to as the non-emergency ambulance service.
2. The Patient Transport Service is commissioned jointly for Greater Manchester, as part of a North West contracting process, led by NHS Blackpool CCG. In Greater Manchester the service is provided by Arriva Transport Solutions Ltd took over the contract from the North West Ambulance Service in April 2013. Our report is about performance since Arriva took the contract over.
3. This report and recommendations have been produced as a collaborative effort by members of the Greater Manchester Healthwatch network.
4. Every local authority has a statutory duty to fund a local Healthwatch in their area. Local Healthwatch organisations are the consumer champion for health and social care in their area.
5. The 10 local Healthwatch organisations in Greater Manchester have come together to form an informal network. This helps them to work together, on behalf of the whole population of Greater Manchester and to look at health and care issues that cross local authority boundaries.
6. Information about Healthwatch, including how to get involved in your local Healthwatch, is available from the Healthwatch England website at www.healthwatch.co.uk