



Department
of Health

From Ben Gummer MP
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Mr J. Pollard
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30 JUL 2015

Thank you for your letter of 29th May 2015 following the inquest into the death of Elizabeth Lester. I was very sorry to hear of Ms Lester's death and wish to extend my sincere condolences to her family.

Your concerns in this case are levelled at the clinical call handling system used by the call handlers at the North West Ambulance Service (NWAS) to determine the category of ambulance response time which should be allocated to emergency calls.

You consider that a vital question related to chest pain is excluded from the scripted questions used when the patient has breathing difficulties. As a result of this, the call handler initially failed to ask a key question in determining Ms Lester's condition and a significant delay was caused in prioritising her transport to hospital.

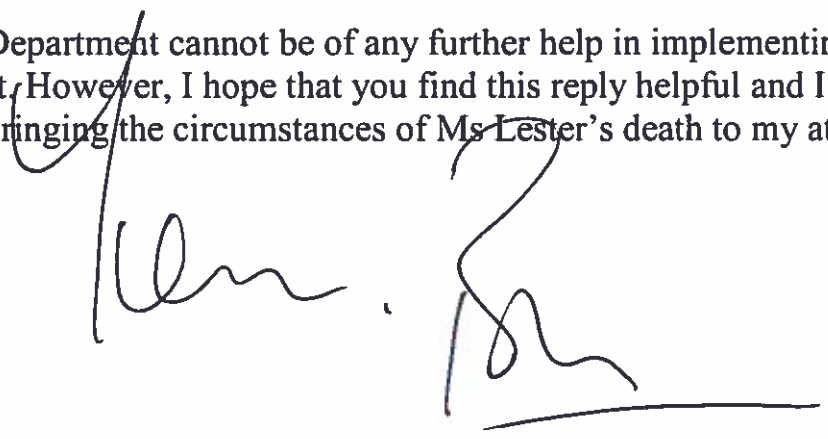
You raise the following concerns:

- You believe there is an omission in the questions that are included on the breathing difficulties card. You ask for this to be rectified with the addition of a question about chest pain.
- You have been told that the local ambulance service cannot alter the wording themselves as it must be done by the software suppliers.

I understand that the call system used by NWAS is the Advanced Medical Priority Dispatch System (AMPDS) developed by the Priority Dispatch Corporation, an independent body. AMPDS is an international call handling system which is used by some, but not all NHS ambulance services in England. The other system used by providers is NHS Pathways. It is open to ambulance trusts to choose which of these two systems to use.

Users of AMPDS must contact Priority Dispatch directly if they feel that an element of the system needs to be reviewed and changed. I understand NWAS has responded to your report suggesting that you write directly to the AMPDS contact at Priority Dispatch UK asking for the changes that you have recommended to be considered. I would support this.

I am sorry that the Department cannot be of any further help in implementing the changes you suggest. However, I hope that you find this reply helpful and I am grateful to you for bringing the circumstances of Ms Lester's death to my attention.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Gummer', written over the text of the second paragraph. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a horizontal line underneath the name.

BEN GUMMER