

National Medical Director
NHS England & NHS Improvement
Skipton House
80 London Road
London
SE1 6LH

Ms Alison Mutch
Senior Coroner
Greater Manchester South
Stockport Coroners Court
1 Mount Tabor Street
Stockport
SK1 3AG

2nd March 2021

By email: [REDACTED]

Dear Ms Mutch,

Re: Regulation 28 Report to Prevent Future Deaths – Anthony Slack (DOD: 13.04.2020)

Thank you for your Regulation 28 Report dated 1 December 2020 concerning the death of Mr Anthony Slack on 13 April 2020. Firstly, I would like to express my deep condolences to Mr Slack's family.

The Regulation 28 report concluded that Mr Slack's death was a result of recognised complications of COVID-19 exacerbated by an industrial disease. I note the medical cause of Mr Slack's death was as follows:

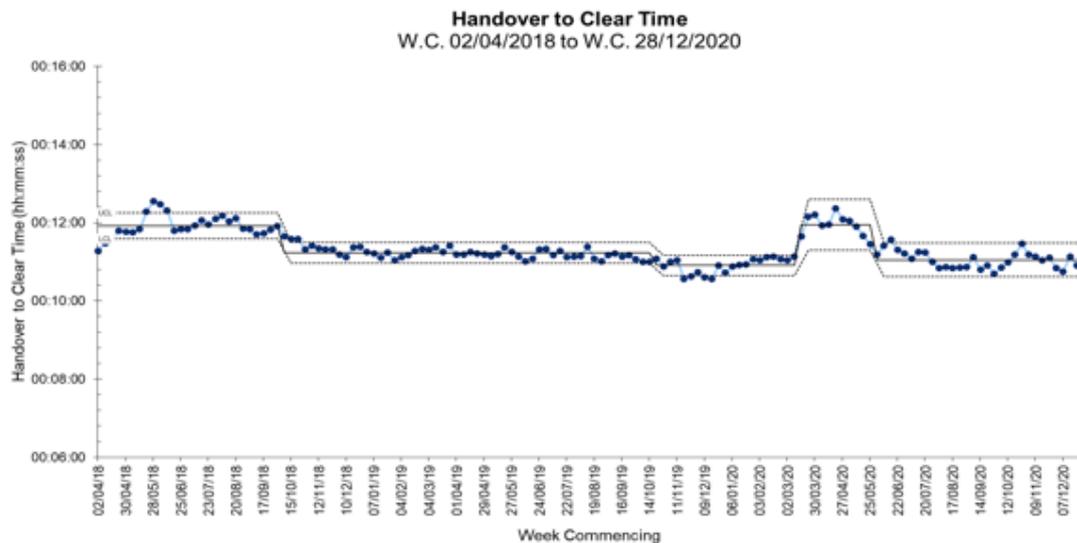
- 1a) Community Acquired Pneumonia
- 1b) COVID-19
- 2) Dementia, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease, Asbestos Related Pulmonary Fibrosis, Pleural Plaques, Type 2 Diabetes

At the conclusion of the inquest you raised concerns in your Regulation 28 Report addressed to NHS England regarding the delayed ambulance attendance due to shortages of available ambulances. I understand that the inquest heard evidence that this was as a consequence of COVID related absences amongst ambulance staff and further, the additional cleaning requirements. The inquest was told that at some points in the day and in some acute trusts, ambulance crews were being supported by on-site cleaning crews, which resulted in quicker turnaround times and thus increased ambulance capacity. However, the witness indicated that such support was inconsistent and not offered on a 24/7 basis.

I have liaised directly with the North West Ambulance Service (NWS) in respect of your concerns.

The graph below shows the average 'handover to clear' times from April 2018 to March 2020 i.e. the elapsed time between the point at which a patient is handed over into the care of the Emergency Department and when an ambulance crew are able to clear from an incident to make themselves available for further emergencies.

The graph demonstrates that hand over to clear times had consistently remained within the 15-minute national target but did increase in March 2020, which has been attributed to the additional cleaning required as a consequence of COVID – 19 pandemic.



Throughout March 2020, operational teams at NWS liaised with local Emergency Departments to establish cleaning teams to assist ambulance crews with the additional cleaning required following each handover. This partnered service meant that once a patient had left the ambulance, a cleaner would enter the saloon of the vehicle and clean the ambulance on the crews' behalf whilst they completed handover, in order to improve 'handover to clear' time. The roll-out of this initiative was initially challenging due to the differing structural setups of local Emergency Departments, however as part of an initial roll out, the first Emergency Department went live 6 April 2020 with a two shift system operating from 06:00–14:00 and 14:00–22:00 with two persons per shift. The initiative was rolled out to seven other Emergency Departments in the North West.

Following the initial roll out, a feasibility review was undertaken which highlighted periods of inactivity between 06:00–08:00 and 19:00 to 22:00. As such, the cleaning service has been revised and is now offered between 08:00–19:00 at each location.

In response to the increasing pressure on the NWS service, the cleaning service was extended further and NWS crews are now supported by on-site cleaning crews at sixteen Emergency Departments across the North West.

I understand that the cleaning service was not in place at Tameside Hospital at the time of Mr Slack's attendance, though I can confirm that such a service is now provided there.

Should an NWS crew attend an Emergency Department at a time or location where the on-site cleaning crew is not in operation, ambulance crews are advised to complete on-board cleaning themselves, in the usual way. It should be noted that even at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, the handover to clear times have consistently remained well within the 15-minute national target.

Thank you for bringing this important issue to my attention and please do not hesitate to contact me should you need any further information.

Yours sincerely,



National Medical Director