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Alison Mutch
HM Senior Coroner, Greater Manchester South
HM Coroner's Court
1 Mount Tabor Street
Stockport
SK1 3AG

December 2022

Dear Ms Mutch,

Thank you for your letter of 15 June 2022, to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, about the death of Mr Keith Hopwood. I am replying as Minister with responsibility for Health and Secondary Care and thank you for the additional time allowed.

I would like to begin by offering my deepest condolences to the family and loved ones of Mr Hopwood. It is of course vital that we take learnings where they are identified to improve NHS care and I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

In preparing this response, Departmental officials have made enquiries with NHS England and the Care Quality Commission (CQC).

The government is committed to supporting the ambulance service to manage the pressures it is facing, ensuring that people receive the treatment that they need when they need it. There are a range of measures in place to improve performance.

The NHS has set out a plan to substantially increase capacity and resilience this winter. NHS bed capacity will be increased by the equivalent of at least 7,000 general and acute beds, including a mix of new physical beds and expanding the use of innovative virtual wards to treat patients safely at home.

Building on the NHS plan, Our Plan for Patients set out further urgent action, including £500 million for an Adult Social Care Discharge Fund, helping people get out of hospitals quickly, freeing up beds and reducing long waits in A&E. This is alongside work led by the National Discharge Taskforce to reduce delayed discharge across acute, mental health, and community care settings, working with social care partners to implement best practice

In addition, NHS England has allocated £150 million of additional system funding for ambulance service pressures this year and £20 million to upgrade the ambulance fleet. NHS England is also providing targeted support to some of the hospitals facing the greatest delays in the handover of ambulance patients into the care of hospitals, helping them to identify short and longer-term interventions to improve delays and get ambulances swiftly back out on the road. This is alongside a new national Winter Improvement Collaborative programme to help other trusts identify the root causes of handover delays and implement best practice.

Furthermore, ambulance trusts receive continuous central monitoring and support from the National Ambulance Coordination Centre, and all local systems are establishing 24/7 System Control Centres to better manage demand at a system level.

The NHS will also expand falls response services right across the country, which will see local teams sent to help people who have fallen in their home or in care homes, rather than unnecessary trips to hospital.

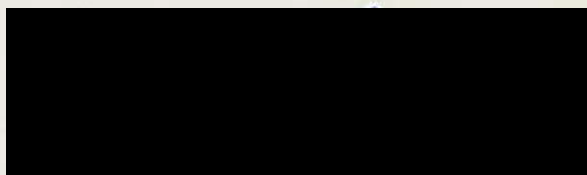
We have made significant investments in the ambulance workforce, and the number of NHS ambulance staff and support staff has increased by over 40% since August 2010. Health Education England has a mandated target to train 3,000 paramedic graduates nationally per annum from 2021-2024, further increasing the domestic paramedic workforce to meet future demands on the service. St John Ambulance has also been contracted to deliver auxiliary ambulance services, providing national surge capacity of up to 5,000 hours per month to support the ambulance response during periods of increased pressure, allowing NHS ambulance crews to focus on responding to emergency calls.

In addition, national 999 call handler numbers have been boosted to around 2,350, over 300 more than September 2021, with plans to increase further to 2,500 by December 2022, supported by a £1.3 million national recruitment campaign. This is alongside a £50 million national investment across NHS 111 in England for 2022/23, supporting additional NHS 111 capacity to ensure people get the care they need when they need it, avoiding unnecessary demand on ambulances. This builds on additional investment from last year.

Finally, in 2020/21, £450 million was invested to upgrade A&E facilities in over 120 separate trusts, to boost capacity and reduce overcrowding helping to clear ambulance queues more quickly.

I hope this response is helpful. Thank you for bringing these concerns to my attention.

Yours sincerely,

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the Minister of State for Health.

WILL QUINCE MP

MINISTER OF STATE FOR HEALTH