



Department
of Health &
Social Care

[REDACTED]

Miss Emma Brown
HM Area Coroner
Birmingham and Solihull Coroner's Court
Steelhouse Lane
Birmingham
B4 6BJ

24th November 2022

Dear Miss Brown,

Thank you for your letter of 16 June 2022 about the death of Mr Lee Anthony Caruana. I am replying as Minister with responsibility for Health and Secondary Care, and thank you for the additional time allowed.

Firstly, I would like to say how saddened I was to read of the circumstances of Mr Caruana's death and I offer my sincere condolences to his family and loved ones. The circumstances your report describes are very concerning 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 (NHSE), as well as the relevant regulator in this case, the Care Quality Commission.

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. Ambulance trusts receive continuous central monitoring and support from the NHSE funded National Ambulance Coordination Centre, and there is a range of support in place to improve performance.

NHSE has allocated £150 million of additional system funding for ambulance service pressures in 2022/23, supporting improvements to response times through additional call handler recruitment, retention and other funding pressures. NHSE has also tendered a procurement contract for auxiliary ambulance services with a total value of £30 million. This contract will provide national surge capacity as needed to support the ambulance response during periods of increased pressure by enabling fully equipped and crewed ambulances to be deployed in localities during times of surge pressure. In addition, the Ambulance Auxiliary provider is expected to support the NHS in the event of major incident or other disruptive challenge through the provision of flexible clinical and logistical resource.

Further to this, the Department has made significant investments in the ambulance workforce. The number of NHS ambulance and support staff has increased by almost 40% since February 2010, and 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.

In addition, national 999 call handler numbers have been boosted to over 2,300 at the start of May 2022, about 400 more than September 2021, with potential for services to increase

capacity further during 2022/23. A £1.3 million national campaign for the 999 call handlers was initiated in March to support trusts. This is alongside a £50 million national investment across NHS 111 in England for 2022/23 to support additional NHS 111 capacity to ensure people get the care they need when they need it and avoid unnecessary demand on ambulances. This builds on additional investment from last year.

In July 2021, NHSE allocated an additional £4.4 million to ambulance services to support retention of emergency ambulances and thereby increase the fleet for winter. This improved service capacity, keeping 154 fully equipped vehicles on the road. To further increase ambulance capacity, £20 million of capital funding will be invested in each of the financial years 2022/23, 2023/24 and 2024/25.

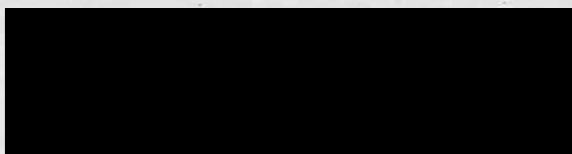
Additionally, NHSE has undertaken targeted support to some of the hospitals facing the greatest delays in the handover of patients from ambulances into the care of hospitals, helping them to identify short and longer term interventions to improve delays and get ambulances swiftly back out on the road. Work is taking place across all Integrated Care Boards to determine the amount of capacity needed to support performance and how this can be delivered. Focus remains on improving flow, including maximising alternative pathways to Emergency Department (ED) and reducing occupancy through the work of the National Discharge Taskforce with membership from local government, the NHS and national government. Local health and social care partners are already standing up the use of additional action to support discharge and improve patient flow. Ambulance services have been working closely with their local systems to reduce avoidable conveyance and support patients to get the care they need outside of hospital; conveyance rates to ED are the lowest ever outside periods of national lockdown.

Finally, in 2020/21, £450 million was invested to upgrade A&E facilities in 175 smaller schemes and 25 major schemes. This was used to boost physical capacity in A&Es through expanding waiting areas and increasing the number of treatment cubicles, reducing overcrowding and supporting social distancing throughout the pandemic and helping to clear ambulance queues more quickly. This continued in 2021-22 with investment in 25 major schemes, which so far have delivered 382 waiting spaces, 175 major cubicles, 42 resus cubicles, and 177 SDEC cubicles.

To drive further progress and support regional and local system arrangements, the Department has established a national discharge taskforce with membership from local government, the NHS and national government. Local health and social care partners are already standing up the use of additional action to support discharge and improve patient flow. We will continue exploring options that minimise delays to hospital discharge, including identifying capacity to accommodate people who no longer need acute hospital care while continuing to need other forms of support.

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