



Department of Health & Social Care

*From Helen Whately MP
Minister of State for Social Care*

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Annex A

[REDACTED]

Catherine Wood
Assistant Coroner
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Coroner's Court and Offices
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[REDACTED]

February 2024

Dear Mrs Wood,

Thank you for your letter of 8 January 2023 to Steve Barclay as Secretary of State for Health and Social Care about the death of Kyriacos Athanasis. I am replying as Minister with responsibility for Health and Secondary Care. Please accept my sincere apologies for the delay in responding to this matter.

Firstly, I would like to say how saddened I was to read of the circumstances of Mr Athanasis' 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.

The report raises concerns about ambulance handover delays, emergency department capacity, patient safety checks, and patient discharge at James Paget University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (JPUH). In preparing this response, Departmental officials have made enquiries with NHS England and the Care Quality Commission. My officials advise me that the Integrated Care Board (ICB) responsible for JPUH, Norfolk and Waveney ICB, provided a comprehensive response on 3 February 2023 which included information on the improvements being made locally, and details of a serious incident investigation report following Mr Athanasis' death.

I recognise the significant pressure the NHS has been under since the pandemic. That is why we published our Delivery Plan for Recovering Urgent and Emergency Care Services. The plan aims to deliver one of the fastest and longest sustained improvements in emergency care waiting times in the NHS's history. It sets out an ambition to improve A&E wait times to 76% of patients being admitted, transferred, or discharged within four hours and to reduce average Category 2 response times to 30 minutes this year, with further improvements to be set as part of the NHS planning guidance for next year 2024-25.

We are taking a number of steps to improve ambulance response times. Ambulance trusts are receiving an additional £200 million of funding this year to expand capacity and deliver new ambulances, helping patients receive the treatment they need. We are also delivering 6

new ambulance hubs and 42 new and upgraded discharge lounges in hospitals across the country, backed by nearly £50 million investment. The ambulance hubs will help reduce handover delays and get ambulance back on the road faster, while the discharge lounges will speed up the safe and effective discharge of patients from hospital, freeing up hospital beds.

A key part of the recovery plans is about improving hospital's patient flow and bed capacity. The recovery plan will deliver 5,000 more staffed, permanent beds and scale up virtual ward beds which are now over 11,000. This increase is backed by £1 billion of dedicated revenue funding and £250m of capital funding. A further £1.6 billion of funding for social care over two years is being provided to reduce the numbers of beds occupied by patients ready to be discharged. These measures will speed up emergency admissions and reduce overcrowding in Emergency Departments enabling ambulances to handover patients more quickly.

In addition, Same Day Emergency Care (SDEC) services will be in place across every hospital with a major emergency department, helping avoid unnecessary overnight stays in hospital. The SDEC model helps to reduce pressure on emergency departments because patients receiving SDEC can be rapidly assessed, diagnosed, and treated without being admitted to a ward, and if clinically safe to do so, will go home the same day their care is provided.

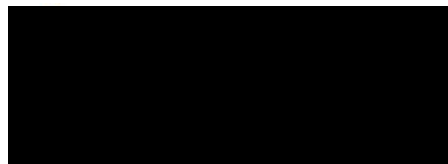
We recognise there is variation in performance across the country. That is why the delivery plan also provides for a new tiering performance and improvement approach to provide targeted support to challenged systems. There is support in place at national and regional level to support Tiers 1 and 2 with a universal improvement support offer being made available for all systems which will help improve system performance across the whole patient pathway.

At a national level, we have seen significant improvements in performance this year compared to last year. Average Category 2 ambulance response times (including for serious conditions such as heart attacks and strokes) were almost 47 minutes faster in December 2023 than the same month last year, a 51% reduction. Average East of England Ambulance Service NHS Trust Category 2 response times decreased by 60% over the same period.

Further, national data shows that 69.4% of patients were admitted, transferred, or discharged within 4 hours of arrival at A&E, compared to 65.2% the same month last year, while performance at JPUH was 66.5% in December 2023, an improvement of 4.4% over the same time period.

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

Yours,

A solid black rectangular box used to redact the signature of Helen Whately.

HELEN WHATELY