



[REDACTED]

Caroline A. Saunders  
Senior Coroner for Gwent  
Gwent Coroner Service  
The Civic Centre  
Godfrey Road  
Newport  
South Wales  
NP20 4UR

20 March 2023

Dear Caroline

**Re: Mrs Dorothy Anne Jones**

Thank you for your letter of 20 January, in which you enclosed a copy of a Regulation 28 Prevention of Future Deaths report following the conclusion of the inquest into the death of Mrs Dorothy Anne Jones.

Firstly, I would like to take this opportunity to offer my sincere condolences to Mrs Jones' family on their loss.

The Welsh ambulance service exists to deliver life-saving interventions and take patients promptly to hospital, but the pandemic, recent periods of unprecedented pressures and challenges with patient flow have had a massive impact on emergency care services across all parts of the UK. We recognise that, at times, demand has outstripped capacity and that this has resulted in long delays, and poorer experiences and outcomes for some patients. However, the vast majority of patients are receiving timely access and safe care.

I note you have also written to [REDACTED], Chief Executive of the Welsh Ambulance Services Trust and I would expect him to respond on the detail of the concerns you raised as these relate to operational matters and are best addressed by the Trust. I can, however, outline the actions being taken by the Welsh Government to drive national and local improvement in the delivery of safe and timely ambulance services.

We have made significant investment in urgent and emergency care this year, with a dedicated budget of £25m annual funding to support local, regional and national delivery of the [Six Goals for Urgent and Emergency Care](#), our five-year strategy published in February 2022, to drive a whole-system transformation of access to urgent and emergency care. In 2022/23 each health board in Wales received up to £2.96m to support implementation of local 'six goals' improvement programmes, and £4m has been used to support nationally-coordinated projects.

A national Six Goals for Urgent and Emergency Care Programme has been established to secure improvements across the patient pathway, with a specific focus on patient flow through the hospital system and out into the community, as well as significant investment in urgent primary care and same day emergency care to help reduce pressure on 999 services and emergency departments. A [direct paramedic referral to same day emergency care services](#) pathway has also been developed to enable suitable patients to by-pass the emergency department and gain direct access to the most appropriate clinical destination for their needs.

I have been encouraged by progress against a number of key urgent and emergency care indicators which has been influenced by the 'six goals' programme and I will provide a detailed update to Members of the Senedd on the overall urgent and emergency care programme plan a year on from its implementation on 2 May, when I will also confirm plans for 2023/2024 intended to help people access the right care, in the right place, first time.

We have also made investments in ambulance services, including £3m funding made available in June 2022, to support delivery of a national ambulance improvement plan developed by the Emergency Ambulance Services Committee and approved by health board chief executives. The plan included a range of actions for delivery by the Welsh ambulance service, health boards and actions for joint delivery, to enable better management of 999 demand in the community, increased ambulance capacity and improved timeliness of ambulance patient handovers.

Thanks to our early investment, the Welsh ambulance service has been able deliver a range of actions to increase capacity including:

- Implementation of new triage and video consultation technology, supported by £250,000 Welsh Government funding, to support more confident decision making by paramedics about whether a patient needs to be taken to hospital. This has enabled WAST to increase the number of 999 patients who can be safely managed through remote telephone assessment, enabling people to receive the support they need in the community and freeing up ambulance resources to respond to other calls. In January, 15% of patients were safely assessed and discharged over the phone.
- The Welsh Ambulance Services Trust has recruited 380 new staff in the past 9 months, which includes filling vacancies and increasing its overall headcount and will help to future-proof its workforce.
- The Trust has confirmed it has completed the implementation of new staff rosters for emergency medical services (EMS), marking the end of a two- and half-year project including 146 rosters, 80 working parties, and 1,800 staff. The efficiencies associated with the new rosters will equate to 72 whole time equivalent staff. The project will now be evaluated to support longer-term benefits realisation and learning.
- We have also seen progress from the Trust in delivering the agreed workforce efficiencies which are helping to increase capacity, including a reduction in sickness absence, supported by an attendance management programme and 40-point plan.

- Discussions between the Trust and its trade union partners regarding further workforce efficiencies are ongoing.

The national ambulance improvement plan has also seen all health boards develop local ambulance handover improvement plans, many of which have been in place since August 2022, which include a range of actions to help increase flow, improve patient experience and outcomes, and free up ambulance capacity to respond to urgent calls in the community. Health boards have also committed to handover improvement trajectories for each of their major emergency departments with an initial focus on eradicating delays over 4 hours and reducing the average number of minutes 'lost' per ambulance arrival on a monthly basis.

On 28<sup>th</sup> November 2022, I hosted a national summit on improving the timeliness of ambulance patient handover, which was attended by more than 40 senior NHS Wales representatives from across the seven health boards and the ambulance service. At the summit, health boards set out the range of actions they are taking across the six goals for urgent and emergency care as well as actions targeted at reducing ambulance handover delays. They also reaffirmed their commitment to delivering urgent improvements ahead of the winter, in line with local handover improvement plans and the national ambulance improvement plan. My officials continue to track progress and impact against the commitments health boards and the ambulance service have made and I have been encouraged by the examples of improvement at a number of sites, most notably the University Hospital of Wales.

Following this summit, and building on the progress made in delivering the actions from the national ambulance improvement plan and local handover improvement plans, EASC has agreed new integrated local improvement plans with each health board and WAST. These plans started to come into place from November 2022 and contain commissioning intentions, priorities and performance improvements and the operational plan to support delivery across the breadth of local six goals for urgent and emergency care programmes.

Regular performance and monitoring meetings held by EASC with each health board will drive delivery of these improvement plans and my officials will continue to seek assurance on delivery against these plans through regular Integrated Quality, Planning and Delivery (IQPD) meetings with each health board, WAST and EASC.

I have been somewhat encouraged by the improvements in the timeliness of ambulance patient handover, and in response times for Red and Amber calls, since we saw record poor performance in December 2022. January 2023 saw a reduction of more than 25% in the number of 'ambulance hours' lost to handover delays across all Welsh health board areas, when compared to December, and national ambulance handover performance in January represented the best performance since August 2022. This has had a positive impact of ambulance performance nationally, including a significant improvement in the median response time for Amber calls in January, which was in fact the fastest since May 2021.

These improvements must, however, be considered in the context of a reduction in demand in January, likely in relation to a change in public behaviours instigated by media coverage of NHS pressures and industrial action. It is also evident that performance has not improved in all parts of Wales and I have been clear with all Health Boards in my expectations that they must work together, and with the Welsh ambulance service and partners to understand local, regional and national challenges and agree collaborative actions to ensure patients within their communities receive safe and timely access to assessment and treatment and ensuring ambulance crews are available to respond when needed, through a whole system approach.

I understand [REDACTED] has extended an offer to meet with you to discuss the Trust's response in more detail and to provide further assurances regarding the Trust's commitment to ongoing improvement.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]  
Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol  
Minister for Health and Social Services