



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Minister Whately MP
Minister of State for Care*

*39 Victoria Street
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Ms Alison Patricia Mutch OBE
HM Senior Coroner for the Coroner Area of Greater Manchester South
Coroner's Court
1 Mottram Street
Mount Tabor
Stockport
SK1 3AG

2 May 2024

Dear Ms Mutch,

Thank you for your letter of 20 June 2023 to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care about the death of Joan Mary Corcoran. I am replying as I am replying as Minister with responsibility for urgent and emergency services. Please accept my sincere apologies for the delay in responding to this matter. I would like to assure you that the department is mindful of the statutory responsibilities in relation to prevention of future deaths reports and we are prioritising responses as a matter of urgency.

Firstly, I would like to say how saddened I was to read of the circumstances of Ms Corcoran's death, and I offer my sincere condolences to her family. The circumstances your report describes are concerning and I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

The report raises concerns over long ambulance response times by North West Ambulance Service NHS Trust (NWAS). In preparing this response, Departmental officials have made enquiries with NHS England and the North West Ambulance Service Trust (NWAS) who have reassured me that regional performance is improving.

As the Minister responsible for urgent and emergency care services, I recognise the significant pressure the urgent and emergency care system is facing. That is why we published our 'Delivery plan for recovering urgent and emergency care services' which aims to deliver sustained improvements in waiting times. Our ambitions for this year are to improve A&E waiting times to 78% of patients to be admitted, transferred, or discharged from A&E within four hours by March 2025, and to reduce Category 2 ambulance response times to 30 minutes across this fiscal year. The plan is available at <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/B2034-delivery-plan-for-recovering-urgent-and-emergency-care-services.pdf>

Your report highlights that NWAS were under high demand at the time of the incident. A primary aim of our delivery plan is to boost ambulance capacity. Ambulance services received £200 million of additional funding in 2023/24 to expand capacity and improve response times, and we are maintaining this additional capacity in 2024/25. This is alongside the delivery of new ambulances and specialist mental health vehicles. With more ambulances on the road, patients will receive the treatment they need more swiftly.

I recognise that ambulance trusts work within a health and care system and issues such as delayed patient handovers to hospitals can impact on capacity and response times. That is why a key part of the delivery plan is about improving patient flow and bed capacity within hospitals. We achieved our 2023/24 ambition of delivering 5,000 more staffed, permanent hospital beds this year compared to 2022-23 plans, backed by £1 billion of dedicated funding, and we will maintain this capacity uplift in 2024/25. Further, we also achieved our target of scaling up virtual ward bed capacity to over 10,000 ahead of winter 2023/24, and there are now over 11,000 beds available nationally. We also have provided £1.6 billion of funding over two years to support the NHS and local authorities to ensure timely and effective discharge from hospital. These measures are helping improve patient flow through hospitals, reducing delays in patient handovers so ambulances can swiftly get back on the roads.

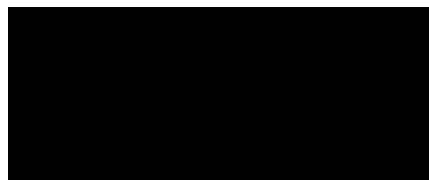
At a national level, we have seen significant improvements in performance this year compared to last year. In 2023-24, average Category 2 ambulance response times (including for serious conditions such as heart attacks and strokes) were over 13 minutes faster compared to 2022-23, a reduction of over 27%. NWS average Category 2 response times were over 13 minutes faster, a 32% reduction.

Information on ambulance handover times has been published since October 2023. In March 2024, average patient handover times in the NWS region were 32 minutes 51 seconds, and this is the second month in a row that handover time has improved.

However, I recognise there is still more to do to reduce response times further, and the Government will continue to work with NHS England to achieve this.

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

Yours,



HELEN WHATELY