



Department of Health & Social Care

*From Minister Helen Whately
Minister of State for Care
39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU*

Our Ref: PFD – 24-03-20 - WALKER

Assistant Coroner Hannah Berry
South Yorkshire (West)
Medico Legal Centre
Watery Street
Sheffield
S3 7ES

By email: [REDACTED]

14 June 2024

Dear Ms Berry,

Thank you for your report of 20 March to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care regarding the death of Jean Walker. I am replying as Minister with responsibility for urgent and emergency care services.

Firstly, I would like to say how saddened I was to read of the circumstances of Mrs Walker's death, and I offer my sincere condolences to her family and loved ones. It is vital that where Regulation 28 reports raise matters of concern these are looked at carefully so NHS care can be improved. I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

Your report raised concerns about ambulance response times and capacity at Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS Trust (YAS) as a result of handover delays at hospitals. These concerns were also raised directly with the responsible NHS Integrated Care Board.

In preparing this response, my officials have made enquiries with NHS England (NHSE). I am informed that the West Yorkshire Integrated Care Board will shortly be responding on the specific local actions being taken to support ambulance response times. NHSE has advised my officials that investment is being made for additional crews and fleets as well as clinical workforce in the Emergency Operation Centre to support decision making on the phone and support crews attending calls at home. Further, I understand that there is work with partners across the region to address handover delays including implementation of a Duty to Rescue protocol to release crews from hospitals to respond to immediate community emergencies.

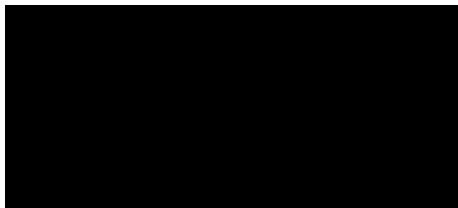
As the Minister responsible for urgent and emergency care services, I recognise the significant pressure the NHS is facing and the impact on waiting times for patients. In January 2023, NHS England published a two year 'Delivery plan for recovering urgent and emergency care services' which aims to deliver sustained improvements in waiting times, with a target for this year to reduce Category 2 response times to 30 minutes on average. An update to this plan has now been published, to build on learnings from the first year and to continue to support systems to improve performance and reduce waiting times. The plan is available at:

https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/PRN01288_ii_Delivery-plan-for-recovering-urgent-and-emergency-care-progress-update-and-next-steps-May-2024.pdf

Your report highlights reduced ambulance resource in the Yorkshire region at the time of the incident. To support ambulance services, ambulance trusts received £200 million of additional funding in 2023/24 to expand capacity and improve response times. In addition, to improve patient flow and bed capacity within hospitals £1 billion of dedicated funding was provided to increase staffed core hospital beds by 5,000 compared to 2022/23 plans.

Since publication of the plan in January 2023, there have been improvements in performance. At a national level 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 the previous year, a reduction of over 27%. In the Yorkshire region, average Category 2 response times were over 9 minutes faster compared to the previous year, a 23% reduction. Regarding handover delays, in April the average patient handover time in the Yorkshire region was 29 minutes 2 seconds.

Yours,



HELEN WHATELY