



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From Helen Whately
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HM Coroner David Ridley
Wiltshire & Swindon Coroner's Office
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14 June 2024

Dear Mr Ridley,

Thank you for your Regulation 28 report of 25 April to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care regarding the death of Richard Carpenter. 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 Mr Carpenter's death, and I offer my sincere condolences to his family and loved ones. It is vital that where Regulation 28 reports raise matters of concern these are looked at carefully so that NHS care can be improved. I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

Your report raises concerns over ambulance response times in the South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust (SWAST) region and a relationship with availability of hospital beds linked to delays in discharging patients.

You have appropriately shared your report and concerns with SWAST, who are best placed to respond on the specific action they are taking locally with NHS system partners to reduce handover delays and improve ambulance response times.

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 ambulance 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/publication/urgent-and-emergency-care-recovery-plan-year-2-building-on-learning-from-2023-24/>

Your report highlights that SWAST were responding to high demand. 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

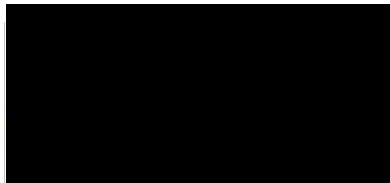
within hospitals £1 billion of dedicated funding was provided to increase staffed core hospital beds by 5,000 compared to 2022/23 plans.

£1 billion was invested this year through the Discharge Fund in commissioning packages of care for people being discharged and improving discharge processes. A £40 million fund was also launched in September 2023 for local authorities in areas with the greatest challenges on urgent and emergency care. Local authorities used this funding for social care provision and strengthening admissions avoidance and discharge services over the past winter. The number of people discharged from hospital with packages of health and social care support has increased by 9% from the end of March 2023 to the end of March 2024.

Since publication of the recovery plan in January 2023, there have been improvements in performance. Nationally 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 27%. For SWAST, average Category 2 response times were over 26 minutes faster over the same time period, a 38% reduction. There have also been improvements in handover delays with SWAST handovers almost 20 minutes faster on average in April than October 2023 (information on ambulance handover times has been published since October 2023).

Thank you once again for bringing these concerns to my attention.

Yours,



HELEN WHATELY