



Department
of Health &
Social Care

Minister of State for Health (Secondary Care)

39 Victoria Street
London
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Our ref:

HM Coroner Guy Davies
Cornwall Coroner's Service
Pydar House
Pydar Street
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TR1 1XU

By email:

30 May 2025

Dear Mr Davies,

Thank you for the Regulation 28 report of 3 April sent to the Secretary of State about the death of Andrew Waters. I am replying as the Minister with responsibility for urgent and emergency care.

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

The report raises concerns regarding prolonged ambulance response times, operational pressures faced by the South Western Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust, A&E overcrowding and the impact of delayed social care packages on hospital capacity and ambulance handover delays. I recognise the concerns raised with health and care delivery in the region, which align with representations from local members of parliament.

In preparing this response, my officials have made enquiries with NHS England to ensure we adequately address your concerns.

The Government is clear that patients should expect and receive the highest standard of service and care from the NHS. The Government also accepts that the NHS's urgent and emergency care performance has been below the high standards that patients should expect in recent years. We have been honest about the challenges facing the NHS and we are serious about tackling the issues; however, we must be clear that there are no quick fixes.

To start with, in the Autumn Budget, the Government announced an extra £22.6 billion in day-to-day spending in 2025/26 for the NHS compared to 2023/24, to help cut NHS waiting times. An additional £3.1bn further capital investment over 2 years will provide the highest real-terms capital budget since before 2010.

We recognise that investment alone won't be enough and are determined that it must go hand in hand with fundamental reform. On 5 December 2024, the Government published the Plan for Change (available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/plan-forchange>), that set the mandate for the direction of change with clear milestones in five national missions, including building an NHS that is fit for the future.

On 30 January 2025, the Government published 'Road to recovery: the government's 2025 mandate to NHS England', that clearly set out delivery instructions for the NHS through the prioritisation of five key objectives aimed at driving reform within the NHS. Improving A&E and ambulance wait time was a prioritised objective in the mandate to specifically address the current challenges facing urgent and emergency care.

On the same day NHS England published the 2025-26 planning guidance that contained the operational delivery detail for local NHS systems. The planning guidance included an implementation target for improving the average Category 2 ambulance response times to no more than 30 minutes across 2025-26, and practical actions focused on reducing avoidable ambulance dispatches and conveyances. NHS England is also working with systems to reduce ambulance handover delays, working towards delivering hospital handovers within 15 minutes with joint working arrangements that ensure no handover takes longer than 45 minutes. Although, the South Western Ambulance NHS Foundation Trust's Category 2 ambulance response time performance improved in March by over 8 minutes to 37 minutes and two seconds compared to the previous year there is clearly much more still to do.

The NHS planning guidance also includes an implementation target for improving A&E waiting times compared to 2024/25, with a minimum of 78% of patients seen within 4 hours in March 2026 and increasing the proportion of patients admitted, discharged, and transferred from an emergency department within 12 hours across 2025/26 compared to 2024/25.

Turning to the issue of delayed patient discharges, the government is tackling delayed discharges to reduce hospital stays and free up beds by strengthening NHS and social care partnerships.

In January 2025, we set out priorities for the NHS and local authorities on how to move to a neighbourhood health service that delivers more care at home or closer to home. We are asking local systems to systematically implement six core components of neighbourhood health, which will help people stay healthy and independent for longer and reduce unnecessary time spent in hospital, including tackling hospital discharge delays.

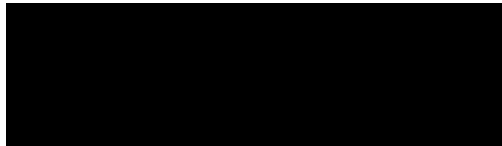
In January 2025, we also published a new policy framework for the £9 billion Better Care Fund. Under the new framework, the NHS and local authorities have clear accountability for setting and achieving joint goals that include reducing discharge delays.

In June 2025, to accompany the additional investment in the NHS, the Government will publish its 10-Year Health Plan which will set out the radical reforms for the NHS. The health plan will focus on ensuring three big reform shifts in the way our health services deliver care. First, from 'hospital to community' to bring care closer to where people live. Second, from 'analogue to digital' with new technologies and digital approaches to modernise the NHS, and third from 'sickness to prevention' so people spend less time with ill-health by preventing illnesses before they happen. The reforms will support putting the NHS on a sustainable footing so it can tackle the problems of today and the future.

In addition, we will also shortly set out the lessons learned from the pressures on urgent and emergency care services this winter and the improvements that we will put in place to further improve services during 2025/26.

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

Yours sincerely,

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MINISTER OF STATE FOR HEALTH