



Department of Health & Social Care

Minister of State for Social Care
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London
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Our Ref: [REDACTED]

Abigail Combes
Assistant Coroner
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Coroner's service, Medico-Legal Centre
Watery Street
Sheffield S3 7ES

By Email: [REDACTED]

20 May 2024

Dear Ms Combes,

Thank you for your letter of 2 August 2023 to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care regarding the death of Lee Dryden. 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 deeply sorry I was to read the circumstances Mr Dryden's death and I offer my sincere condolences to his family. It is vital that we learn from incidents, where they are identified, to improve NHS care. I am grateful to you for bringing these matters to my attention.

Your report raised a concern that Royal College guidance on how external providers should report images to NHS trusts was not understood or embedded by NHS trusts. I understand that NHS England, after also receiving your report, has written to you on the specific actions that have been taken or are underway to clarify guidance around imaging reports and how they should be shared between NHS trusts and independent sector providers. In addition, all North East & Yorkshire systems have been asked for assurance that national guidance is being followed. I hope this has provided reassurance on the action being taken on this issue.

Your report also raised concerns about response times by Yorkshire Ambulance Service NHS trust (YAS) including the impacts of handover delays. I note NHS England also responded on the action they are taken in relation to this concern. As the Minister responsible for urgent and emergency case 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 reduce Category 2 ambulance response times to 30 minutes on average. The plan is available at [B2034-delivery-plan-for-recovering-urgent-and-emergency-care-services.pdf \(england.nhs.uk\)](https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/B2034-delivery-plan-for-recovering-urgent-and-emergency-care-services.pdf)

Your report highlights that YAS 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.

Since publication of the plan, we have already seen significant improvements in performance. 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%. In the Yorkshire region, average Category 2 response times were over 9 minutes faster over the same time period, a 27% reduction.

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.

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

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