

NHS KENT AND MEDWAY PATIENT TRANSPORT SERVICE

Early Days Service Overview

The new Patient Transport Service went live on 1 July 2013. The transition was not smooth and there were several factors that caused significant issues in the early period:

- Colleagues transferred from five different organisations into NSL
- NSL inherited shift patterns that did not support the new service specification
- Different activity volumes than those anticipated
- Higher levels of staff absence and sickness than expected
- Higher levels of reliance on contractors than expected

This is essentially a new patient transport service that was Kent focussed, rather than Trust based.

Summary of Rectification Actions

Communications

Call volumes in week 1 reached a peak in volume and whilst we planned for higher volumes these were surpassed by 3 times and as a result many callers experienced significant delays in accessing the system. This was broadly under control by the end of week 1 and call volumes started to fall in the second week. There was an increase in phone answering performance in line with the reduction in call volumes and the percentage of calls answered has remained above 90% since the first week of the contract. There is still some work to be done to reduce the time taken for patients to reach a call taker and this is a focus area.

KPI Description	Jul-13	Aug-13	1st - 29th Sept-13
Calls answered within 30 seconds.	58%	74%	70%
Calls answered within 60 seconds.	64%	80%	76%
Calls answered	83%	93%	91%

Table 1

Daily meetings were held with the Commissioners and Trusts throughout the first two weeks, so that issues could be raised and resolved. Additional NSL on site management support was provided and an NSL presence in the form of floor walkers was introduced at each major site. This presence has remained in place as the service beds in. These key colleagues have dedicated mobile phones and provide an on-site escalation service, supported by the Kent control room. We continue to work closely with Commissioners and Trusts whilst we make the necessary improvements to service delivery standards.

Planning and IT

There were some issues with data transfer where a small number of planned journeys did not come across into the new system. These volumes were not high, but caused major 'on the day' issues as NSL was only made aware when a point of care or a patient called in to enquire about their transport. Depending on the mobility type of the patient this could lead to significant delays in transport. Where this occurred we apologised to the patients affected and rearranged their transport. These data transfer issues were generally resolved during the first four weeks due to the dynamic nature of the service.

In order for the service to be delivered to the standard required in the contract specification and expected by patients in Kent, the planning for the whole of Kent needed to be merged and delivered from one location. Some colleagues who transferred into NSL had very limited knowledge beyond their own areas of control and some were unable to work from the Larkfield site, where Planning and Control is based. This led to some instances of poor logistical planning in the early weeks and it is taking some time for other colleagues to learn the new areas and become proficient in the use of our planning and control systems. We have deployed experienced planners from elsewhere in NSL and have also recruited additional planning staff to resolve this issues more quickly.

In order to manage and control the ambulance crews efficiently they are issued with handhelds that provide a real time link to the booking system. This allows controllers to assign work to them dynamically, contact them using push to talk, and monitor progress during the day since they enter pick up and drop off times in real time. There was limited opportunity to train the transferring colleagues prior to go-live which meant that the system was not being used fully across the contract until week four. This caused delays in improving the service delivery and had a negative impact on patient experience.

HR

Several transferring colleagues found themselves working in areas they had not previously served, particularly in the West of the county, and it took some time for them to get used to this. NSL has also experienced high volumes of sickness and absence in the workforce which is being managed in line with the Terms of Conditions in place for the transferred colleagues. Shifts patterns (including start time, finish time and weekend working) are different across the County, and generally not in line with those required to deliver to the contract specification. A new shift pattern is currently being consulted on and is expected to be in place by early December. This mismatch between shift times and service requirement means that there is a shortfall in resources at specific times of the day. Until the consultation is completed this is being managed using a combination of volunteers (who are willing to work the shift pattern now), sub-contractor crews and bank staff. We have also recruited an additional twenty five colleagues on NSL terms and conditions since go live and intend to recruit a further twenty four within the next six weeks.

Patient Experience

Though the service and therefore patient experience has improved over the past three months we have received a significant number of complaints, mainly related to the timeliness of the service. All of these patients have received a letter of apology addressing their specific complaint, together with assurance of our commitment to improving the service. In addition, NSL managers have visited several patients to deliver an apology in person. We have also maintained an open channel with local media in order to issue apologies, statements and information as appropriate. The following table shows the number of complaints we have received in the last three months.

Month	July	August	September	Total
Complaints	52	53	37	142
Journeys	21,541	20,999	20,506	63,046
% Complaints	0.24%	0.25%	0.18%	0.23%

Table 2 Complaints

Summary of Current Performance Levels

Contract performance in July was poor and caused significant issues for both patients and Trusts. We have worked closely with our NHS colleagues to address the key issues and our performance has improved steadily over these three months. Table 3 shows our performance against the key indicators. Though there is clearly a lot more for us to do it does demonstrate that there has been a steady and sustained improvement in performance.

KPI	Description	Jul-13	Aug-13	1st - 29th Sept-13
Arrival Time - pre planned	Patients arriving 60 minutes prior to their appointment	49%	63%	67%
Arrival Time - pre planned	Patients arriving 30 minutes prior to their appointment	31%	46%	49%
Arrival Time - renal	Renal Patients arriving 30 mins prior to their appointment	29%	53%	57%
Return journeys (excluding renal or 'on the day requests')	Patients collected within 60 minutes	76%	80%	83%
Return journeys - renal (excluding 'on the day requests')	Renal patients collected within 30 minutes	46%	57%	67%
Discharged/Transfer patients	Booked 'on the day' collected within 3 hours	86%	80%	89%
Discharged/Transfer patients	Booked 'on the day' collected within 2 hours	70%	66%	78%

Table 3

An action plan has been developed and implemented to address how we will improve our performance levels and we expect these standards to continue to improve and the team is focussed on meeting the contract KPI's fully by the end of October 2013.

Summary

We are deeply sorry for any distress that has been caused to our patients and have apologised to the people we have let down. We are very disappointed that the

contract did not make a more seamless transition but we are satisfied that we did all we could to manage the issues we encountered. Many of the problems could not have been addressed during the implementation phase but we should have identified and communicated them more effectively as risks. We should not have been caught by surprise. We have conducted an internal lessons learnt exercise which we will incorporate into any future implementations.

We are currently working closely with Commissioners and Trusts to ensure that we are prepared for the expected surges in activity associated with winter pressures.

We remain fully committed to making this a flagship service for the people of Kent and Medway.

Alastair J Cooper
Managing Director - NSL Care Services