An Evaluation of Patient Transport Services from the Patient’s Perspective

Report of NEAS findings

June 2011

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Background Information

National Agenda – Why involve the public?

In the UK, a long series of official reports has called for greater patient and public engagement. According to the Picker Institute’s ‘Engaging Patients in their Healthcare’ engaging patients in their healthcare and encouraging people to take responsibility for protecting their health are now seen as the best way to ensure the sustainability of health systems.

Patient-centred care is at the heart of plans for the NHS. Liberating the NHS articulated an ambition to transform the culture of care. The government proposed a shift in power that puts patients and their carers in charge of making decisions about their health and wellbeing, gives them more information, choice and control over how their care is delivered, and strengthens the voice of the public. For example through HealthWatch, a new consumer champion.

The NHS Plan set out a vision for a service designed around the patient – a service of high quality which is fast, convenient and uses modern methods to provide care where and when it is needed. Such services need to be designed around patients but also be responsive to them, offer them choices and involve them in decision making and planning.

The document Creating a Patient-Led NHS (CPLNHS) (DH2005) stipulates that the NHS moves away from a service that does things to and for its patients to one which is patient led, where the service works with patients to support them with their health needs.

Our Health, Our Care, Our Say, (DH 2006) states that systematically and rigorously finding out what people want and need from their services is a fundamental duty of (provider) services and that NHS organisations must ensure that local people (service users) play a full part in the planning, design and delivery of their services, (DH 2006).

The public have told government that they want more influence over health and social care services. The government is committed to empowering both individuals and communities, putting them at the heart of the NHS, so that they can play a greater role in shaping health and social care services. It is also easier for professionals to provide a better service if they understand what the community needs.

People are now better informed about making healthy choices and better equipped to make decisions about their healthcare, so it is essential that we use people’s knowledge and experience to improve the services they use. This national agenda is a key driver for reform to ensure that our local services have a truly patient focussed approach.

If we are to create and maintain a patient-led service, centred on the needs of both individuals and communities, it is essential that we create a stronger voice for patients, service users at all levels of the health and social care system. There are excellent examples of how citizens and service users are already influencing their local services. The public have given a huge amount of time, skill and energy becoming involved in patient forums, patient participation groups and other networks in order to influence and improve their local services.
Introduction

In undertaking a strategic review of our Patient Transport Service, we are keen to understand what patients and users of our service value and how we can further improve on the effectiveness and quality of this service.

The Patient Transport Survey was sent out in June 2011 to over 600 people who used the service on a specific date in May. This was a random sample of people from across the region. Of these surveys 198 completed forms were returned.

The same survey was sent out to 600 patients in January this year and the data will be cross analysed to identify any trends at the end of the year.

In the first part of this report we compare the results from January and June. In the second we focus on the differences in experiences based on modes of transport. Here we compare the ambulance car driver service, taxis and ambulances. In this survey only a small number of recipients (16 people) used a taxi for transport on the day. However 65 used the ambulance car driver service and 109 used the ambulance service. The results could not therefore be considered statistically significant. The information that we gather over the year will prove to be more significant but this information is still useful in giving us some indication of different experiences.

Four surveys are taking place over the year and so a fuller and more significant analysis will be made by early 2012.

Methodology

Survey

Patients were written to with a questionnaire and accompanying letter. All patients were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and could not be used to identify them or affect their future use of the service. Patients were also informed that they did not have to return the survey if they did not wish to do so.

The results are shown alongside the PTS survey findings from January 2011 to allow us to make some comparisons.

Two further surveys will be carried out during 2011 to allow us to compare whether different times of the year make a difference to patient experience.

Sample

This survey captures the views of those users who accessed the PTS Service on a specific date in May. A total of 600 patients were chosen at random to form the sample group. There was a return rate of about 33%, similar to January’s survey which had a return rate of 32%.
Survey design

The questions have been kept uniform so that effective comparisons can be made at different times of the year. This also allowed bulk printing of the survey and return envelopes for 2011 so as to save on printing costs.

The evaluation method looked to elicit quantitative or factual data by way of a tick-box questionnaire. There was also space given in the survey for patients to add additional comments or freely express themselves about their experiences. This qualitative data helped capture the human experience. The aim was to capture a wide range of information by using a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions.

A comparison can be made between the different modes of transport from the findings of this survey from June and the survey that took place in January. The experience of patients who used taxis is compared to those who used the ambulance car service and ambulances. Patients were also asked if they would like to take part in a focus group in the coming months, however there was no uptake for this. The text requesting volunteers for this will be made more prominent in the next survey, to be sent out in autumn 2011.
Patient demographic

Thematic Map Showing Number of PTS Responses by Postcode District

Number of Patients in Postcode Districts
- 4 to 8
- 3 to 4
- 2 to 3
- 1 to 2
- 0 to 1
The map above is a representation of postcode areas where PTS transport was used from the surveys submitted.

**Analysis of responses**

**Appointment Details**

**Q1. Which hospital and department did you attend?**

**Q2. What time was your appointment?**

**Q3. Please give the first four characters of your postcode, (e.g. DL13)**

All of the above were free text fields. There was a good mix of responses from patients across the region travelling at different times of the day.

A large percentage (38% and 27%) of patients said that they either organised their own transport or their carer did so on their behalf. About the same percentage of patients said that they booked transport through their gp, (23 and 22 %).
The vast majority of patients in both surveys (about 80%) responded that they found it easy to book transport.

Q6. If you found making your ambulance booking difficult please highlight your concerns here.

No one commented in response to this question in either the January or the June survey.
Similar numbers of patients stated that they would not attend their appointment as would take a taxi to hospital.

Q8 - There are many reasons why patients need ambulance transport. Did you use ambulance transport for the following?
Most patients stated they used ambulance transport because of mobility problems or medical need.

Q9 - When transport was requested, did anyone explain to you what would happen on the day of travel in relation to transport services and what time to be ready from?

Most people were informed about what would happen in relation to travel on the day of their appointment.
Sixty nine to seventy per cent were not offered a leaflet but roughly ten per cent said that they were, from both surveys.
Of the reasons given, most were not given a leaflet as the booking was made over the phone. About a quarter of patients were regular users and about ten per cent made the booking at hospital. Six to seven per cent said there were no leaflets available and about a quarter did not respond.
Only about ten percent in both surveys said that they found the leaflet useful and between one and four per cent said that they did not. About 90 per cent did not respond however.
Journey to and from hospital

Just over half of the respondents travelled by ambulance in both surveys, and about thirty per cent by ambulance car. However in each case fewer than ten per cent travelled by taxi.
Most patients waited between 0-30 minutes to be picked up, or 30-60 minutes. Five per cent or under waited for more than 90 minutes.
Most patients were satisfied with the time it took for them to be picked up.
Most patients were taken to hospital within 0-30 minutes or within an hour.
Most of the respondents did not answer this question although about sixteen to seventeen per cent said they were collected from their hospital department... four per cent said they were not.
Most did not respond to this question, one per cent said they were asked for payment.
Again most patients did not respond to this question but between nine and thirteen per cent said they were escorted to the door. Six per cent said they were not.
Over eighty per cent did not respond, about sixteen to seventeen per cent said they were happy with the service.

Q12f. If no, please highlight your concerns here

Only one patient responded within the June survey to state: “Sometimes you have to wait over an hour for your taxi”.
Over half did not respond to this question. However most waited between 0-30 minutes (about thirty per cent) and about fifteen per cent waited up to an hour.
About 40 per cent arrived in time for their appointment however fifty per cent did not respond.
Most patients waited between 15-30 minutes or 30-60 minutes to be taken home.
Although about a quarter of patients did not respond to this question of those who did about half felt they were kept informed and half did not.
Eighty three per cent stated they felt the vehicle was comfortable, six per cent did not respond and eleven per cent said it was not.
Eighty per cent stated it was warm, two per cent said it was not and eighteen per cent did not respond.
Eighty six per cent stated the vehicle was clean, one per cent stated it was not and thirteen per cent did not respond.
Seventy nine per cent stated the vehicle was suitable to their needs, two per cent stated it was not and nineteen per cent did not respond.
Forty three per cent stated the vehicle carried the ‘Complaints and Appreciations’ leaflets, however forty three per cent it did not and fourteen per cent did not respond.
Ambulance Service Staff

Staff scored highly on politeness, being caring and looking smart. Two percent felt that they were not polite, while three per cent felt that they were not caring.
Q17 - Were the ambulance staff caring

- **Yes**: January 74%, June 76%
- **No**: January 0%, June 2%
- **No Response**: January 26%, June 22%
Q18.

Most patients stated that staff wore a name badge, over half said they gave their name, most advised them to wear a seatbelt, drive carefully, respected their needs and offered assistance if required.

**Did the ambulance staff:**

![Graph showing the percentage of patients who agreed with various statements made by ambulance staff. The graph indicates a significant increase in positive responses from January to June.](image-url)
Q18 - Wear a name badge

- Yes: 64% in January, 74% in June
- No: 10% in January, 4% in June
- No Response: 25% in January, 22% in June
Q18 - Give their name

- **Yes**:
  - January: 53%
  - June: 56%

- **No**:
  - January: 23%
  - June: 21%

- **No Response**:
  - January: 23%
  - June: 23%
Q18 - Advise you to wear a seat belt

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<tr>
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<td>84%</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
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<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
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<td>10%</td>
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Q18 - Drive carefully

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>16%</td>
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Q18 - Respect your personal needs and requirements

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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>14%</td>
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Q18 - Offer assistance if required

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<th></th>
<th>January</th>
<th>June</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>81%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>18%</td>
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</table>
About twenty five to thirty per cent of patients had an escort.
Most people had an escort with them for moral support or because of communication or sensory difficulties, those who stated ‘other’ stated it was due to mobility difficulties.
Overall, about half the patients felt the service was excellent and twenty eight to thirty six per cent felt it was very good. Under ten per cent felt it was acceptable and one to three per cent felt it was poor. One percent felt that it was very poor and six per cent did not respond.

Q22. If you have any additional comments that you would like to make on the service you received, or improvements that could be made, your suggestions would be welcome.

Some of the comments made in the June survey are below:

It was much more convenient having local taxi service who knew the area. I was always on time and home at a reasonable time. In May I was waiting for my lift at 5pm and didn't arrive home until 7.45pm. I found this unsatisfactory.

I have had problems in the past with the GP. Receptionist never tells NEAS I have an electric wheelchair and oxygen. I am happy with the ambulance service they are very helpful and friendly.

I found ambulance staff to be great. however on this occasion I was left to come out of my home myself, walk to ambulance with little help to get inside. Had to ask to have seatbelt fastened. We then drove to hospital after pick ups.
Quality of driving and care was outstanding from the drivers.

My husband needed a stretcher ambulance and wasn't informed on the morning there wasn't one. It was booked two weeks in advance. My husband had waited three months for this appointment. When I rang to ask I was told there weren't enough ambulances.

I used to get a lift from my sister. I thought it was just for the elderly I enquired and found out I could get it. I think your services are brilliant, thank you.

I'm a regular user of the service because of amputation of lower right leg and because of my age - 86 years. Each time I have used the service the personnel have been marvellous.

I found the seats very uncomfortable.

I have no complaints with system or staff.

The L.A taxi driver was most unhelpful. My carer had to push me up a big ramp and out to the taxi. Driver didn't help me into the taxi or with chair at either end.

The ambulance service didn't start early enough to get me to my appointment.

As I use this excellent service about four times a year why is it always necessary to be asked the same questions about mobility etc? I would have thought this information would be stored.

The ambulances used are unfit for passenger transport. I travel to Newcastle and Sunderland. The only difference is that Sunderland have more speed bumps on their roads. It takes me days to recover from the journey. I have spinal problems.

Ambulance driver have me every care and attention. She was very considerate and a good careful driver. Also operated the lift carefully and explained everything before the lift was operated.

On way in first vehicle was dirty with rubbish on floor, no restraints in the back and was uncomfortable so not appropriate for the job. On way back it was a clean vehicle and much better.

I was told that there would be a long wait on the way back, 4-5 hours so I took a taxi and paid. I couldn't wait that long. This is not satisfactory the ward sister should have arranged the transport earlier.

I have absolute respect for ambulance service they do treat patients with care and respect.

Would like to be kept more informed about the time of arrival and going home

My mum's been using ambulance for 15 years and they treat you with respect and no bad words. They support you in every way. They always see that get home in a reasonable time.
Ambulance didn't turn up for 1.30pm appointment and didn't arrive that afternoon. I finally rang and cancelled another appointment for 4pm. It's the only problem I have with the ambulance service, the time you have to wait.

Service was excellent on two appointments that I had.

I can't believe the kindness I had and am very happy with all of the NHS.

Feel you should be given reference number to quote once you're accepted as regular user. Only state change in circumstances when applicable.

Driver was very helpful and didn't hurry me, told me to take my time. They were very friendly indeed hope they keep up the good work. It's much appreciated thank you for your help.

Conclusions

Many of the responses given by patients were very similar in the January and June surveys indicating that time of year did not in this case have an influence on experiences. From this it seems that winter pressures did not make a difference to patient’s views of the PTS service. It will be interesting to compare the information collected over the coming years.
We can further break down how the taxis, ambulance cars and ambulances compared within the June survey below.

Q15. Was the vehicle:

<table>
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<th>Vehicle Type</th>
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<th>No</th>
<th>Nil</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambulance Car</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambulance</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taxi</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
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Ninety three respondents stated that they felt ambulances were comfortable, eight stated they were not. Fifty seven stated they found ambulance cars comfortable and one did not. Ten stated that taxis were comfortable, two said they were not and four did not respond.
Fifty nine stated that ambulance cars were warm, four felt they were not. Eighty four said that ambulances were warm, two felt they were not. Ten people felt taxis were warm, six did not.

Sixty respondents felt that Ambulance cars were clean, one did not. Ninety five felt that Ambulances were clean, one did not. Thirteen people felt that taxis were clean no one stated that they were not clean.
Sixty one people felt ambulance cars were suitable for their needs and two did not. Eighty one felt that Ambulances were suitable for their needs and two did not. Thirteen felt that taxis were suitable for their needs and no one stated that they were not.

Q17. Were the ambulance staff:

Polite
Sixty said that they felt ambulance car drivers were polite, no one responded to say that they were not. Ninety seven said that Ambulance crews were polite, two felt they were not. Eleven people said that taxi drivers were polite, no one responded to say that they were not.

Forty nine people said that they felt ambulance car drivers were caring, no one responded to say they were not. Eighty nine said that they felt ambulance crews were caring and two felt they were not. Ten stated they felt taxi drivers were caring, no one stated that they were not.
Fifty seven people said they thought ambulance car drivers were smart, no one stated they were not. Ninety nine people said they felt Ambulance crews were smart, no one responded to say they were not. Eleven people stated taxi drivers were smart and no one responded to say they were not.

Q18. Did the ambulance staff:

Fifty four said that Ambulance car drivers wore a badge, three said they did not. Eighty people said that Ambulance crews wore a badge and five said that they did not. Nine said that taxi drivers wore a badge, no one responded to say they did not.
Thirty seven said that Ambulance car drivers gave their name, whilst fourteen did not. Sixty three said that Ambulance crews gave their name while twenty three did not. Eight taxi drivers gave their name and two did not.
Fifty eight were given advice on wearing their seatbelt in an ambulance car, one was not. One hundred and four were advised by Ambulance crews and ten were advised by taxi drivers.

Fifty eight of Ambulance car drivers were said to drive carefully. Ninety two people felt Ambulance crews drove carefully and one did not. Eleven people felt taxi drivers drove carefully.
Fifty four people felt Ambulance car drivers respected their needs, ninety felt ambulance crews did so and ten felt that taxi drivers did so.

Fifty four stated that Ambulance car drivers assisted them if required, ninety two said ambulance crews did so and ten said that taxi drivers did so.
For overall quality, thirty seven felt that ambulance cars were excellent, twenty one felt that they were good. Fifty four felt that ambulances were excellent, forty two felt they were good. Four people felt taxis were excellent, six felt they were good. Under six people felt that these services were acceptable, poor or very poor.
Twenty nine people waited between 0-30 minutes for an ambulance car, twenty four people waited between 30-60 minutes. Thirty seven waited between 0-30 minutes for an ambulance, thrity seven waited between 30-60 minutes. Five people waited between 0-30 minutes for a taxi and seven people waited between 30-60 minutes.
Twenty one people waited between 0-30 minutes for an ambulance car, twenty five waited between 30-60 minutes. Fifty seven people waited between 0-30 minutes for an Ambulance and forty four waited between 30-60 minutes. Seven people waited between 0-30 minutes for a taxi and six people waited between 30-60 minutes.

Twelve respondents waited up to 15 minutes for an ambulance car whilst twenty three waited between 15-30 minutes and nineteen waited between 30-60 minutes. Eighteen people waited up to 15 minutes for an ambulance, thirty one waited between 15-30 minutes and twenty seven waited between 30-60 minutes. One person waited up to 15 minutes for a taxi, four people waited between 15-30 minutes and four people waited between 30-60 minutes.

Conclusions

As there were a low number of patients who used taxis in this survey a good comparison could not be made. However on analysing all the data gathered this year we will have more significant results. The overall data here is useful in giving us patients’ views of the different services and highlights where the service is doing well and where potential improvements could be made.