



Patients receive the right care at the right time with NHS Pathways

▶ Background

The North East Ambulance Service NHS Trust (NEAS) provides services to the counties of Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham and Teesside. The Trust employs about 2,000 people and serves a population of 2.6 million. On average, they respond to more than 900 emergency calls and 230 GP urgent calls every day.

NEAS has been using NHS Pathways to triage 999 calls since 2006 and more recently has been using NHS Pathways to triage calls from the NHS 111 pathfinder site in County Durham and Darlington.

Julie Avis has been a call handler at NEAS since May 2009. Julie predominantly takes 111 calls for the County Durham and Darlington area but also helps out with 999 emergency calls when required.

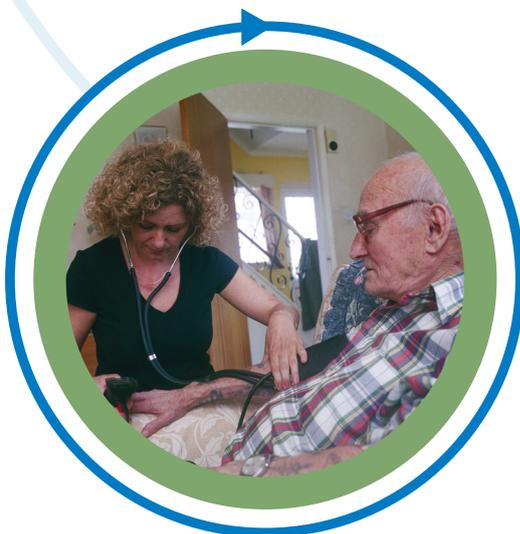


Julie said: *"For anyone considering a role in call handling for 111 or 999 my advice would be to think about it very carefully! Don't just think you are coming into a call centre environment because it is a lot more than that. You will be dealing with people's lives and an urgent call to NHS 111 can quite quickly turn into a 999 life threatening emergency."*

▶ 999 and NHS 111

"You will get calls from patients on 111 that should have been 999, for example, some elderly patients with chest pains call to speak to a doctor when in fact they need an emergency ambulance. As the assessment for both 999 and 111 is the same using NHS Pathways and the systems are interlinked – we can send an ambulance with no delay to the patient."

"The good thing about 111 is that people are becoming aware of another service that is available for urgent care needs rather than just calling 999 because they don't know what else to do."



"This can help take the pressure off ambulance crews who are more readily available to respond to real life threatening emergencies. That said, even if the patient called 999 they would receive the care appropriate to their needs. If they don't need an ambulance they still get a full assessment and are referred to the appropriate service in their area."

"NHS Pathways isn't just a triage system it is much more. It can help educate patients where they should call. If a patient calls in via 111 or 999 and don't need an ambulance but needs to see a GP (once the assessment is complete), you can advise the patient what they need to do or book them an appointment with the practice in the timeframe needed."

NHS Pathways

"My experience of using NHS Pathways has always been great. I use it every day I am at work and with practice I have become more confident. NHS Pathways is designed to triage a patient using a series of questions before identifying the most appropriate care for them. The questions are designed so well that you can actually have a proper conversation with the patient rather than it feeling quite cold and mechanical. This puts the patient at ease quite quickly."

Once the assessment is complete the integrated Directory of Services provides the call handler with a list of primary care services available in the timeframe required for the patient close to their home. It even works out how near the different services are to the patient and how busy they are at the time so the person has all the information they need.

"Patients think it's great, you don't need to look anything up, and it's all done automatically. There is always a service available for any patient 24/7 and I have never come across a situation where a patient needs care but there is nothing available on the Directory of Services. Additionally, we can book a patient an appointment at an urgent care centre or a GP practice electronically too. This is a great use of technology that is working to improve services across the North East."

Changing the way patients think about their care

NHS 111 has been promoted quite heavily in County Durham and Darlington and it is having a significant and beneficial effect on public behaviour. People now have an alternative to 999 and are using it. Patients are becoming more aware of what services are available in the community and are given care as close as possible to their home and they have a choice of where they go to get it.

999 and NHS 111 are the access points for patients and whichever number is called the patient will be triaged in exactly the same way using NHS Pathways, providing a consistent clinical assessment and the most appropriate care for their needs in an urgent and emergency situation. All the outcomes and levels of care in NHS Pathways are set by the UK Royal Colleges on the best available evidence. This means that wherever it is used, patients can be reassured that they get 'only the best'.

For further information on NHS Pathways visit:

<http://www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk/systemsandservices/pathways>

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