

# **Surrey Coalition of Disabled People**

## **Evidence submitted to Health Scrutiny Committee on NHS Patient Transport Services**

**18<sup>th</sup> September 2013**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Surrey Coalition of Disabled People have represented the interests of patients with long term conditions on NHS Surrey's Patient Transport User Group for many years. Patient representatives monitored the performance of the Patient Transport Service (PTS) previously provided by G4S, and were involved in developing the specification for the new service which was re-tendered last year. We were also involved in the procurement process which resulted in the PTS Contract being awarded to South East Coast Ambulance Service (SECamb) from 1<sup>st</sup> October 2012.

The PTS User Group has continued to meet regularly since then with NHS Commissioners, SECamb and Surrey County Council (who provide the Central Booking Service) to monitor implementation of the new Patient Transport Service.

We provided a report for the Health Scrutiny Committee in March this year, which expressed our deep disappointment that the new service was not meeting the high hopes we had of a much improved PTS, due, at that stage to failures by both commissioners and providers. The PTS User Group has met frequently since then to continue to press for improvements. Sadly, we have now to advise the Health Scrutiny Committee that significant problems still remain with the delivery of the Patient Transport Service in Surrey.

## **2. THE PROBLEMS PERCEIVED BY PATIENTS**

The following are the main issues which we believe have yet to be overcome by SECAMB and all parts of the PTS delivery process;

### **2.1. Eligibility assessment**

We were involved in developing a protocol/flow chart to assess patient's eligibility for PTS. However we remain concerned that the questions asked have yet to be standardised through the IT system for booking patients which is used by the Central Booking Service (CBS) run by the County Council and the hospitals. We remain concerned therefore that the eligibility assessment process is not transparent, fair or consistently applied.

### **2.2. Central Booking Service (CBS)**

The CBS provided by the County Council appears from our perspective to have improved and we have received no further complaints about call answering times or the booking process. However we remain concerned that the long promised single telephone number for both bookings and queries has yet to be introduced and publicised, so that patients remain confused about when to call the CBS and when to call SECAMB for queries.

### **2.3. Timeliness of patient transport**

We have continued to receive numerous complaints from patients of significant delays in the arrival of their booked transport, and this therefore remains the biggest problem. We have also been concerned that SECAMB only appear to respond to formal complaints and will not accept 'soft intelligence' about the scale of the problems encountered by many patients. From our perspective the issues are :-

- Patients are often picked up late from home and consequently arrive late for their appointments.
- As a result they spend longer than necessary at hospital because they have ‘missed their slot’.
- Patients are caused great anxiety not knowing when the transport will arrive (or if at all), and although SECAMB said their crew should call patients to let them know that they are delayed or on their way, we have little evidence of this happening in practice.
- Currently the KPI (Key Performance Indicator) which SECAMB has to achieve is to ensure patients reach their appointment within 15 minutes before and 15 minutes after it. This must mean that the majority of patients arrive ‘late’ for their appointment. We have asked the NHS Commissioners to address this problem, so that the KPI requires SECAMB to get the patient to their appointment “on time”.
- The KPI’s are monitored at monthly contract meetings between the NHS Contract Manager and SECAMB, attended by one of our representatives, Nick Marwick. He has been extremely frustrated by the lack of improvement by SECAMB in meeting the KPI’s, particularly on timeliners.

#### **2.4. Vehicles and crew**

We understood the issues faced initially by SECAMB in having to retrain drivers and crew transferred from the previous provider to the standards required for SECAMB’s vehicles and to their own professional standards of conduct and behaviour. However we have yet to see these high standards being met consistently by all crew.

We are particularly frustrated that SECamb have yet to address the problem we have raised about the clamping mechanism for wheelchairs on their new fleet of vehicles. One of our patient representatives is a wheelchair user of the PTS and had offered to test the new vehicles at prototype stage nine months ago. This offer was not taken up and he has repeatedly reported since that the clamping mechanism is extremely difficult for the crew to operate, causing further delays to the patient's journey. We know from our meeting with Paul Sutton, SECamb's Chief Executive, called to express our concerns about many aspects of the overall service, that SECamb now accept that there is a design fault, but we have yet to hear how they plan to address the problem.

## **2.5. Patient Information**

Patients and the public still have no information leaflet to tell them about eligibility for the PTS and how to access it. This continues to cause confusion for everyone and leads to misunderstandings and complaints. We have been told that a leaflet cannot be issued until a single access phone number has been agreed and implemented, so we would urge that this is done soon and that a leaflet is produced and issued widely. We have already provided a sample leaflet, designed with input from patients.

## **3. CONCLUSION**

Most of the concerns described above were highlighted to the Health Scrutiny Committee in March this year, and we believed then that solutions had been identified and were to have been implemented shortly. It is therefore extremely disappointing to now have to report that these problems remain unresolved.

We have been told that SECamb were issued with an Improvement Notice three months ago and that an

Improvement Plan is being implemented. We hope, for the sake of the patients who are still receiving a poor service, that significant improvements will soon be seen.

#### **4. RECOMMENDATION**

We ask that members of the Health Scrutiny Committee note the concerns outlined in our report which has been prepared on behalf of patients needing NHS patient transport in Surrey, and require urgent resolution of the problems.

Cliff Bush OBE

Chair

Surrey Coalition of Disabled People

29<sup>th</sup> August 2013

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