



Scottish
Ambulance
Service



Feedback, Comments, Concerns and Complaints

Annual Report 2021/22





Contents

Introduction	Pg2
Encouraging and Gathering Feedback	Pg3
Encouraging and Handling Complaints	Pg6
Accountability and Governance	Pg7
Our Culture of Learning from Feedback	Pg8
Improvements to Services	Pg11
Conclusion	Pg12

1. Introduction

This has been a very challenging year, and we would like to pay tribute to all our staff and volunteers for their tireless work in the face of these enormous pressures. We are grateful to each and every one of you.

Over the last year, our Service has continued to experience significant pressures as a result of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. This has been felt across the whole of NHS Scotland, with Covid-related workforce absences and lengthy turnaround times at hospitals having a significant effect on response times for ambulances. Every one of our staff has demonstrated their dedication and commitment to the Service and have gone above and beyond to bring care to the patient in these challenging times.

Despite these pressures, we have recorded our highest ever rates of survival for our most time-critically unwell patients, including those suffering from cardiac arrest. We have continued to work with our NHS and social care partners to redesign urgent care. We further enhanced our senior clinical decision-making support, resulting in 279,356 patients (21.26% more than 2020/21) being managed in community settings rather than conveyed to emergency departments.

In response to the increased demand on our service, we accelerated the recruitment of an additional 549 staff and 21 new A&E vehicles across the country, along with a number of other support and response vehicles, through our Demand and Capacity programme. We established ten new stations through co-locations with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and NHS partners. We are also aligning rosters to better meet patient demand. This will result in a change in shift patterns in some locations to fit with the periods that experience the most pressure on our service, improving responses to patients, improving staff welfare and further reducing on-call working.

By 2021 we had already experienced a year of working under a pandemic, and so these new, adaptable ways of working became firmly entrenched within the organisation. This included rigorous infection prevention control processes, such as the wearing of full protective wear, and sanitising work surfaces, as well as the ability to effectively conduct meetings virtually.

Given the demands they faced, one of our top priorities as an organisation was the welfare of our staff. To help ease some of the pressures, we are grateful to our partner agencies including the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, the Ministry of Defence and the British Red Cross, who worked with our staff responding to lower acuity calls, such as falls patients, to protect service delivery and staff welfare.

We liaised closely with health boards to establish facilities at major hospital sites to ensure crews have access to food and drink whilst they are waiting to hand over patients. We also introduced a range of measures as part of our Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2021 to 2024, to ensure all staff and volunteers felt valued and supported. Some of the measures in place included training programmes by Lifelines to develop peer support skills, and the delivery of mental health training.

We have also been developing our mental health provisions to better serve patients over the past year. The Service has been provided with £1.6 million by the Scottish Government over the last three years as part of their Mental Health Strategy. This funding has supported the recruitment of 21 new mental health staff, including thirteen mental health paramedics and a manager, four mental health dispatchers and three clinical effectiveness leads. The funding is also assisting with the continuation of the Service's mental health triage cars, which provide specialist care to people who are experiencing mental health challenges and have contacted the Scottish Ambulance Service for help.

There are three mental health cars available for the east, west and the north, based in Dundee, Glasgow and Inverness. They offer an adaptive and approachable way of responding to people experiencing mental health distress, with a joint response from a mental health practitioner and a paramedic, to meet the patient's immediate needs.

Three new clinical drug leads were recruited in January 2021 to develop a programme of reducing drugs harm and to support the targeted distribution of life-saving naloxone across Scotland. Over the past year they have been leading on the rollout of a national training programme to ensure all paramedics, technicians and nurses are trained to supply Take Home Naloxone to patients. They met their target of distributing 1000 kits by the end of 2021 and have been instrumental in developing connections for SAS clinicians to use to refer patients into treatment pathways.

To ensure the most seriously injured patients receive the right care, the Service has continued to work with colleagues in the Scottish Trauma Network (STN). In August, to coincide with the launch of the South East of Scotland and West of Scotland Major Trauma Centres, we introduced the adult and paediatric Major Trauma Triage Tools (MTTT) to assist responding clinicians in decision-making to triage the patient to the appropriate receiving unit. A number of CPD events for staff were also held as part of the national roll out.

Over the course of 2021 we extended our role in public health with the operation of our drop-in vaccination buses, to help deliver over 60,000 Covid-19 vaccinations across the country. We have worked with Health Boards and local authorities across the country in their vaccination efforts, and the buses have parked up at popular hotspots like shopping centres, football stadiums such as Hampden Park, and outside community centres, churches and mosques. The success of our vaccination buses has been assisted by the Scottish Government, having provided new funding in order to improve the accessibility of vaccines in some of Scotland's most remote places.

Our Mobile Testing Units (MTUs) also played a vital role in helping tackle the pandemic as one of the biggest projects ever carried out at the Service. By the beginning of 2022, they reached the monumental milestone of delivering 2 million tests across Scotland. As the country faced further challenges with the Omicron variant, the MTUs were delivering 15,000 tests a day.

2. Encouraging and Gathering Feedback

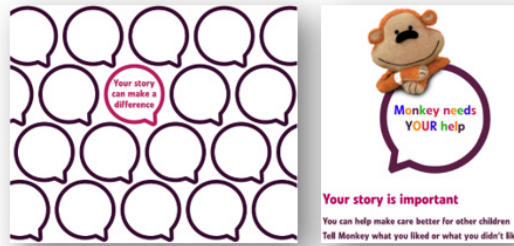
We actively promote a range of methods by which members of the public can feed back their experiences of the Scottish Ambulance Service. Email and telephone continue to be the primary methods of contacting us, but the public are increasingly utilising online channels such as Facebook, Twitter, the Scottish Ambulance Service website and Care Opinion. We also encourage feedback through the Citizens Advice Scotland 'Patient Advice and Support Service'.

The vast majority of our feedback is positive and any comments from patients, their families, carers or members of the public are fed back directly to the staff involved and their manager.

Where negative feedback is involved, a thorough review is undertaken and we engage with complainants throughout the process to explain why certain actions were taken, where any lessons have been learned or where remedial action may have been taken. In certain cases, formal face-to-face meetings are offered and, where appropriate, a sincere apology offered.

We also undertake video interviews with patients, their families and staff members involved in incidents, both positive and negative as a means of learning from feedback and these videos are utilised by our education and training departments to improve our approaches across the organisation.

Care Opinion



We continue to promote Care Opinion as a valuable channel for feedback from patients, families and carers who would rather express their views anonymously or indirectly to the Service. The website allows their voice to be heard on a national forum and gives us a great opportunity to engage with them about the care they received or assist them with any ongoing issues.

About Care Opinion

Care Opinion is a place where you can share your experience of health or care services, and help make them better for everyone.

At Care Opinion we make it safe and simple to share your story online and see other people's stories too. You can see how stories are leading to change.

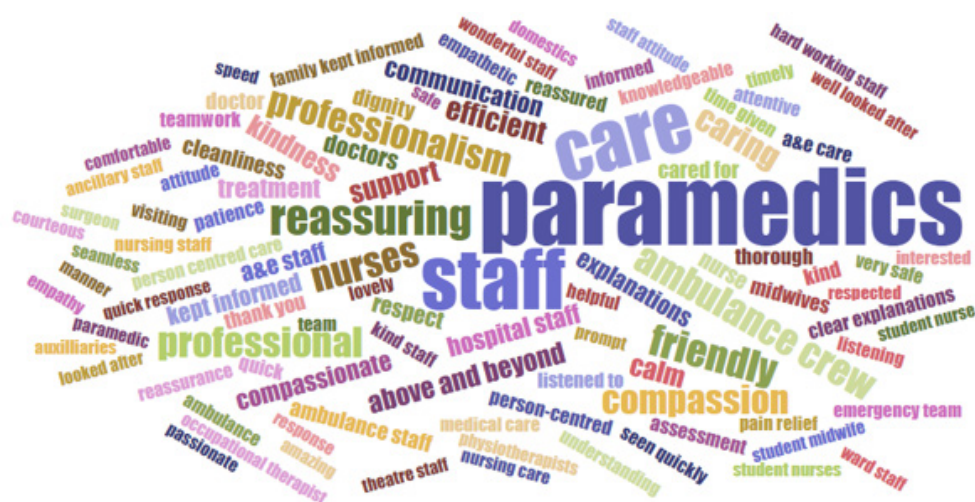
We think that by sharing honest experiences of care, we learn to see the world differently. Working together, we can all help make care better.

The Service is dedicated to reviewing and responding to every post to support patients and their families and this year we responded to 93% of stories within 5 days. The Service is also keen to identify learning from the feedback we receive.

Between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022, 160 stories were posted on Care Opinion relating to the Service. This is an 18.5% increase from the volume posted the year before. On 5 August 2022 these have been viewed 52,114 times. NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde and NHS Lanarkshire board areas currently make up around 36% of the stories posted. Of these posts 64% were posted by the patient themselves.

Of the 160 posts, 64% were uncritical in tone. It should be noted that whilst the remaining 36% will have some form of criticality, this is not necessarily directed towards the Service, with the feedback often involving multiple NHS boards.

Below are some of the most popular tags for what was good about the Service this year.



Compliments

Compliments received from sources other than social media are logged and actioned on our feedback system. Between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022 a total of 957 compliments have been received which shows a 30.7% increase from the previous year when we received 732. The increase has been largely driven by the overwhelming public support for the incredible work that our staff have carried out through the challenges of this year.

Social Media Engagement

We receive the vast majority of our compliments via digital media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and our website – and this positive feedback continues to grow. Over the last 18 months, we have received a huge number of compliments through our social media channels. We would like to thank each individual who took the time to spread messages of kindness and thanks. It has a significant impact on our staff to know that the job they are doing is so appreciated.

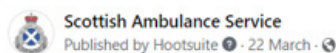


Great story highlighting the work of our staff! Ashleigh was at home with 10-month old daughter Billie, who was struggling to breathe 🙏🙏🙏

She immediately called 999, and got through to call handler, Andrew McNicoll, before Vale of Leven crew Carol Mackie, Paramedic, and Tracy Dickson, Technician, arrived within minutes.

"They made what was the scariest time of my life somewhat easier to deal with and I'm beyond grateful for the amazing job they do. They really are a credit to the Scottish Ambulance Service."

Read more at <https://www.scottishambulance.com/>



The parents of a premature baby boy, born in an Air bnb in Ceres, Fife have thanked Inverness call handler Lorna Milward, who helped save his life. Well done Lorna! 🙏🙏

Read more here [📖](#)

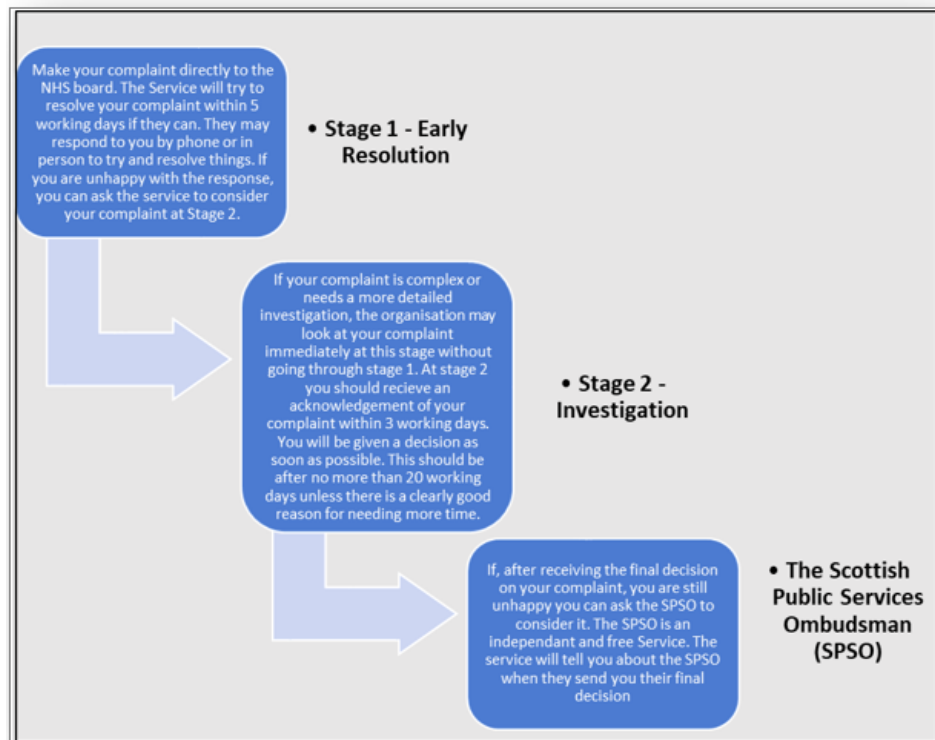
<https://www.scottishambulance.com/.../parents-thank-call.../>

#bluelightheroes #emergencyservices #callhandlers #scottishambulanceservice



3. Encouraging Feedback and Handling Complaints

On the 1st of April 2017, NHS Scotland implemented a new NHS Complaints Handling Procedure (CHP). This was put in place in an effort to improve and standardise how all NHS Boards handle complaints. There is now a two stage process in place. If at the end of this process, the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome, they are sign posted to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO).



During 2021/22, 1,683 complaints were received. This is up from last year when we received 873. This is an increase from the previous year - however last year saw an unusually low volume of complaints being received due to the pandemic. For example, prior to the pandemic in the year 2018/19, we received 1113 complaints.

Of the 1,683 complaints received in 2021/22, 1079 were 'Stage 1' complaints and 604 were 'Stage 2' complaints.

To provide some context, the number of complaints received by the Scottish Ambulance Service in 2021/22 represents around 0.1% of all the calls we received asking for our assistance.

While complaints handling is co-ordinated and quality assured by the Patient Experience Team, complaints are investigated in each region by local staff who will contact the complainant and any staff members involved to look into the issues raised and resolve the situation.

Early conversations with the complainant help to put in place a proportionate review or investigation into the circumstances that led to the complaint. Local managers have access to report functions in order to understand what is working well and to identify areas for improvement. The Patient Experience Team reviews feedback data at a national level to identify any emerging trends that might relate to systemic issues.

There are a number of assurance groups within the Service to ensure that we take the learning from all complaints and utilise this valuable feedback to improve our services further. We also work closely with other health boards and ambulance services across the UK.

4. Accountability and Governance

We ensure patients and carers continue to have access to a range of feedback options for providing feedback to the Service.

Complaints handling is co-ordinated by the Patient Experience Team, with each complaint looked into at local level to drive improvement, while identifying any issues that require national consideration.

Complaints trends and themes are shared in a patient experience paper that is a standing item at our Clinical Governance Committee meetings and our Public Board meetings. This enables members of our Clinical Governance Committee and our Board to review emerging feedback and complaints trends and ensure individuals and groups of staff are given responsibility for addressing areas for improvement and embedding good practice.

COMPLAINTS COMPLIANCE

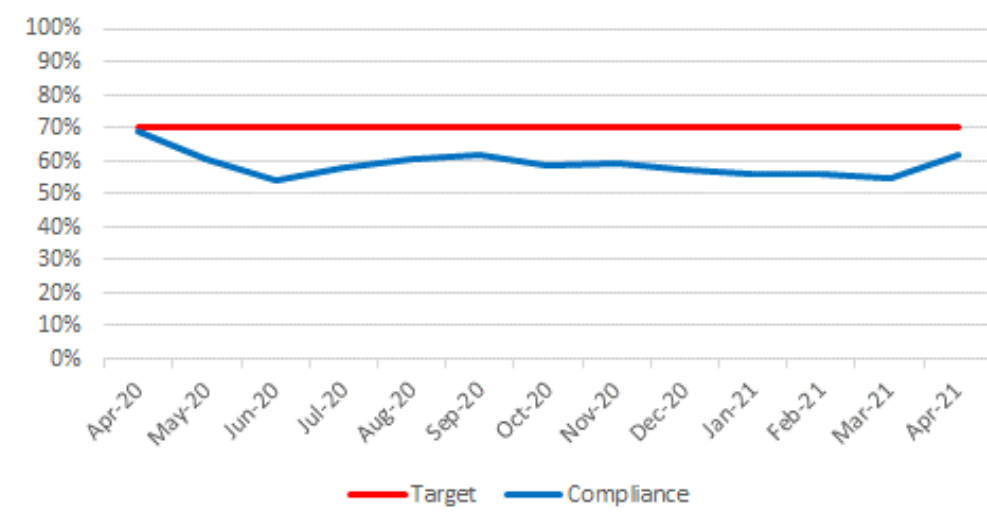
Guidance states that all NHS Boards in Scotland should aim to respond to 70% of 'stage 1' complaints within five working days and 70% of 'stage 2' complaints within 20 working days.

Unfortunately, the Scottish Ambulance Service did not meet the target this year for Stage 2 complaints. As we outlined in the introduction, this has been a hugely challenging year given the various challenges.

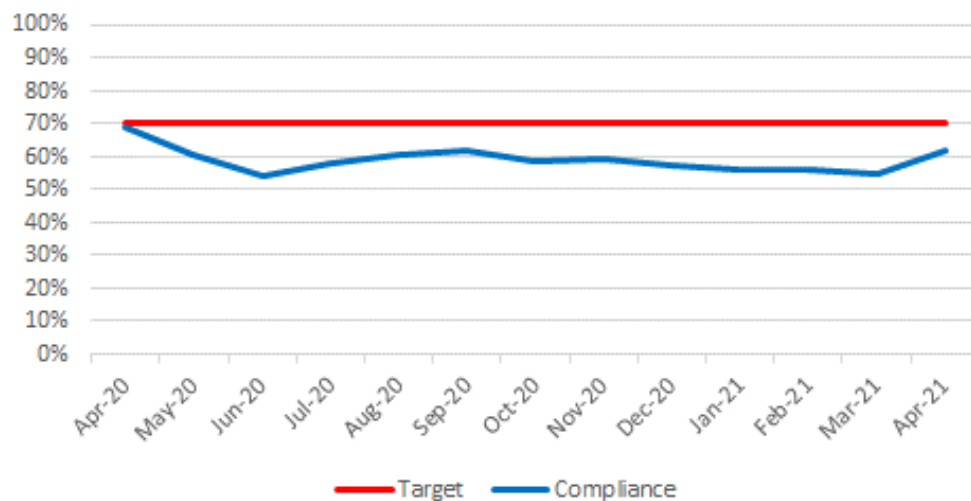
Whilst it is disappointing that the Service was unable to meet the target this again this year for Stage 2 complaints. However, it is encouraging the improvements which have taken place in our Stage 1 complaints following the introduction of new processes. The Service has put new procedures in place to improvement Stage 2 complaint handling as we move forward into a new year and these are being implemented as a priority. This includes commissioning complaints handling training for Managers, increased reporting to Senior Leadership Teams to allow clearer oversight and more detailed management and the recruitment of additional Complaints Handling staff in the Ambulance Control Centre. We are also ensuring that the quality of our investigations and our engagement with patients takes precedence over speed of response.

In 2021/22, Stage 1 compliance was 72.8%, up from 54.9% last year. Stage 2 compliance was 45.01%, down from 61.7% last year.

Stage 1 Compliance Rates 2021/22



Stage 2 Compliance Rates 2021/22



Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)

The Scottish Ambulance Service continues to have a positive relationship with the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

In 2021/22 there were 4 SPSO cases fully investigated, this is the same as the previous financial year. The SPSO fully upheld 1, partially upheld 1 and did not uphold 2. Where cases are upheld or partially upheld, the Scottish Ambulance Service may already have undertaken much of the improvement work and any remedial action suggested by the SPSO in advance of the findings being formally issued. Where this isn't the case, a plan to complete the recommendations will be implemented.

5. Our Culture of Learning from Feedback, Comments, Concerns and Complaints

We have made a clear commitment to ensuring the voices of our patients, their carers and the public are listened to and used to help shape how our services are delivered. This commitment featured prominently in our corporate objectives. These commit our organisation to ensuring our patients, our staff and the people who use our services have a voice and can contribute to service design, with people at the heart of everything we do.

The goal is translated into action in many ways. For example, our project governance documents require project boards to review patient and public involvement requirements in relation to every project to be delivered. Consideration of patient and public involvement at the earliest stages of scoping our projects enables us to build involvement into our projects from the start.

Another example of how seriously we take our responsibilities to involving patients and members of the public is illustrated by how we share patient and carer films across different parts of the Scottish Ambulance Service, including our public Board sessions, so that our staff can hear real examples of what went well and what could have been done better in incidents taking place across the country.

The experience of our patients also features strongly in chief executive communications with our staff, where good practice is highlighted in the weekly staff update. Developments in patient care are also a regular topic in weekly staff engagement sessions, where staff can discuss their recent experiences and any aspects of patient care as well as listen to a weekly topical presentation.

The Scottish Ambulance Service proactively gathers patient and carer feedback on how we deliver services at a local and national level in accordance with our Involving People Strategy. Our Involving People Group allows us to receive and share ideas on future development and improvement. Further developing this group into the Involving People Network has meant that we have enhanced our work with patients beyond the regular scheduled national group meetings that occur four times a year.

Members of our Involving People Network are actively recruited into various support and advice roles within the Scottish Ambulance Service. Some become patient representatives that sit on strategic committees in our service to provide the views of the patient, others provide support and act as critical friends on service developments.

To increase what is already a high level of involvement, we have created a new Engagement Guide and Toolbox to empower operational staff in the gathering of patient and carer feedback and putting lived experience at the heart of every development we make. The idea is to co-design developments of our services with patients, expert organisations and other stakeholders. With this toolbox, we have empowered local project leads to involve their local communities.

We continue our partnership with the mental health organisation See Me. In June 2022, we launched a joint national mental health survey to aid our understanding of what impact the pandemic and restrictions had on the wellbeing of the Scottish population and on our patients who were already struggling with poor mental health. The feedback we received helped us to develop services that meets the needs of anyone we care for who is suffering from poor mental health.

We continue to invest in the mental health and wellbeing of patients and our staff. For example, based on engagement with Scheduled Care Call-Handlers, the mental health training given to them during induction has been redesigned and developed to better meet their needs and expectations when working with patients with a mental health issue. The development was carried out by our mental health team, working closely with See Me and patient volunteers.

Work is also underway with See Me to make the mental health section of our Scheduled Care Patient Needs Assessment more inclusive, and free of stigma whilst determining whether or not a patient has a valid mental health reason for requesting ambulance transport. This is under constant review to ensure we are doing all we can to provide the best care for our patients and also make sure that we can support our staff.

Working in partnership with Young Scot, we created a successful mentorship programme aimed at young people aged 15-18. Under the mentorship of our CEO, the young person built skills in communication, leadership and problem-solving. We will offer this programme on an on-going basis with other members of our Executive Team. Not only are we helping to raise the aspirations of young people across the country, but we are going above and beyond our Corporate Parenting responsibilities.

We created a cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) course for disabled people, which is the first of its kind in Scotland. We are working with Save a Life for Scotland who will be formally launching the programme over the summer 2022. This is supported by the Scottish Government and Resuscitation Council UK. A website hosting accessible training materials and advice/guidance for trainers is currently being trialled by disabled people and Disabled People's Organisations, like Inclusion Scotland and the Glasgow Disability Alliance, to ensure the materials are fit for purpose. East Neuk First responders have been trialling the materials and providing some accessible sessions (Including delivering a CPR session in Makaton). Feedback from participants and trainers has been very positive. Work is currently under development to provide audio CPR instruction to someone when the provider cannot perform CPR themselves but will support another bystander to do it. Given the high disabled population in Scotland, this project has the potential to have a significant impact on public health. With our expertise and support, the Service is contributing to one of the Scottish Government's Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest Strategy 2021-26 aims of making CPR training more accessible and improving population health.



Patient Experience

Tell us about your experience ...

More widely, we are continuing to work in tandem with territorial health boards and third-sector organisations to engage with their pre-existing community networks and learn from their expertise on a variety of service improvements. Through this, and other work, we are promoting a culture of learning from feedback such as compliments, comments, concerns and complaints.

Our plan for the coming year is to build on this and further raise the standard of community engagement and involvement across the organisation.

6. Improvements to Services

Complaint and concern themes and trends

The top three complaint themes in 2021/22 were Delayed Response, Attitude & Behaviour, and 999 Call Triage.

Feedback data received by the patient experience team is shared widely across key staff and business areas in the Scottish Ambulance Service on a quarterly basis to allow them to identify learning and actions.

Delayed Response

The Service this year has experienced almost a full year of sustained and excessive demand, particularly in cases where there have been a large number of call outs to help patients who are in an immediately life threatening situation, such as a cardiac arrest and as a result, some less acutely ill patients sometimes have to wait longer and this can understandably lead to complaints about why there was a delay in getting to a patient. There are ongoing pressures across the health service which are impacting on our ability to respond to some patients as quickly as we would like, such as delays to hospital turnaround times and staff absences. The health service are working closely together on joint action plans to address these challenges.

All delayed response complaints are examined individually and a root cause analysis is carried out via call audits and an examination of the sequence of events to identify if correct procedures were followed or if there were any missed opportunities to send a resource. As part of this work, the Service actively contacts and meets with patients to apologise and explain why a delay may have occurred. We also explain what we are doing to improve the situation.

Following delays due to the pandemic, the strategic demand and capacity review is continuing to be undertaken to identify current and predicted future demand across the country and this exciting piece of work will allow us to strategically align resources with demand.

Attitude and Behaviour

We continue to promote positive patient experiences and the importance of good attitude and behaviour through sharing patient and carer stories with all our staff and linking with our education department to ensure best practice is highlighted.

It is encouraging that the number of compliments the Service continues to receive about the positive attitude and behaviour of our staff far outweighs the number of negative complaints received about the same issue. However, we are keen to know more about the reasons for these complaints in order to learn from them. We are working alongside patients in each and every case to better understand what may have gone wrong – and engaging as a result of this feedback with the staff members involved to identify any individual or organisational learning.

999 Call Triage

When the Service receives a complaint that has any triage concerns it will go through a review carried out by a qualified auditor and efforts will be made to identify any learning that may be available.

The Scottish Ambulance Service (SAS) operates a priority-based system of dispatch. Our Call Handlers utilise a system called Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS) to prioritise all requests for our emergency ambulances. This is a computerised system in which, in response to information provided by the caller, a coded response level is determined.

This system is utilised alongside the Clinical Response Model (CRM) for emergency 999 calls. The CRM aims to save lives by more accurately identifying patients with immediately life-threatening conditions, such as cardiac arrest, and to send the right type of resource first time, safely and more effectively, to all patients based on their clinical need.

The initial triage aims to identify patients with priority symptoms, enabling a timely and clinically appropriate response. Many patients in the 999 system have 'urgent' rather than emergency presentations. i.e. they have issues that can't wait for a routine response but do not require an 'emergency response. Often these needs are better met by other parts of the health and care system and the Service is developing a multi-professional clinical hub to understand better the needs of patients and provide the optimal response.

Conclusion

Reflecting on the year, it has once again been one of the busiest and most challenging in our history. During the financial year ending 31 March 2022 we received 1,647,858 calls and dealt with 829,475 incidents, of which 527,286 were emergency incidents that we attended. We also completed 420,468 patient transport journeys, 4,183 air ambulance missions, 32,491 inter hospital transfers, 2,936 transfer and retrievals across Scotland and 6,599 special operations team responses. Despite the immense and ongoing pressures of COVID-19, the Service has risen to the challenge. We have adapted and found new ways of working to ensure we continue to provide the very best care to patients across Scotland. Our staff have worked incredibly hard to help patients in need during an unprecedented global crisis and have strived to deliver first class patient care.

Although it has taken us longer to investigate and respond to Stage 2 complaints, given the pressures, we have focussed at all times on ensuring that the quality of our investigations remains high, whilst learning lessons when things may have gone wrong.

We'd like to say thank you to our staff for their commitment, dedication and hard work this year in continuing to deliver person-centred care in the most difficult of circumstances. We'd also like to thank everyone who has given us feedback on our services throughout the year, from patients, their families, to members of the public, third sector organisations and partner agencies.

We hope that this report highlights some of the ways in which this important feedback is being utilised for the benefit of all.

Contact us

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