

HOSPITAL TRANSPORT

Introduction

In summer and autumn 2018, Healthwatch Barnet was contacted by community organisations, individuals and some GP staff about the difficulties patients were experiencing in using hospital transport for their journeys to and from Royal Free Hospital sites. The main feedback was about the Hampstead site but we also had feedback about the Barnet site. NHS England had required all hospitals to use the Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service to review whether all journeys were required by patients and to address the issue of those who booked patient transport but then did not use the service.

Findings

Key concerns were as follows.

- Patients with long-term, complex or terminal conditions and with significant disabilities were not meeting the eligibility criteria. Simple yes/no answers were being used to determine eligibility, such as “Can you use a taxi” without supplementary questions, that would determine if they could use a taxi, unaided, sort out [see] and give the payment required and move unaided to the hospital ward or outpatient department.
- Patients were not informed about the porter/concierge service that could provide additional assistance once at the site.
- Patients were only told about the changes if they had an upcoming appointment in the next 6-8 weeks. There was no prior notice. Some patients didn’t attend their appointment because they could not get transport.
- There was no clear information on whether carers could use the hospital transport.
- Patients were not being told they could appeal if their application was unsuccessful.

We talked to RFL about our concerns. Patients had given us permission to talk about their cases and we gave these examples. We said that some patients were not eligible for patient transport, meaning the appointments had been missed as they had no other way of getting to hospital and would have been at risk had they tried. We said that another Trust had undertaken engagement sessions and notified patients by letter in advance of their scheme being implemented. We also requested that RFL review the criteria and how it was applied to patients.

In response to our feedback and that of other patients and community groups, RFL:

- Adjusted the criteria to include supplementary questions to fully understand the patients’ needs
- Re-trained the call handlers.
- Provided more information and publicity about the concierge/porters that are available to assist patients
- Appointed a dedicated PALS officer to handle complaints and appeals.

We are pleased to report that all of the patient cases that Healthwatch Barnet raised with RFL were successful, in that the patient transport was re-instated for those patients.

Response from Royal Free Hospital

Healthwatch Barnet is a member of the Royal Free London NHS Foundation Trust’s patient transport forum and an organisation that regularly provides feedback on our policies and services.

The trust can confirm that the eligibility criterion being used was not new. The criterion has been in use for over three years and is in line with the current Department of Health and Social Care guidelines (2007) and is compliant with the best-practice therein. The reason it became an issue for some of our patients is because the criteria had not been applied as it should have been by the trust's previous transport providers. This resulted in a significant rise in the number of patients using hospital transport and a need to tighten up on the application of the eligibility criteria.

Currently, the trust's eligibility criteria restricts non-emergency patient transport services to patients whose clinical condition means that travelling by any other means would be detrimental to their recovery or existing condition, such as but not limited to:

- patients who need to be transported on a stretcher
- some wheelchair patients
- some patients receiving oxygen
- patients who require paramedic services
- patients who need the support of patient transport staff during the journey

Through the consistent application of the criteria, we identified a small number of patients, who were failing the assessment, but had a medical need(s) which meant they had no other way to get to hospital without the support of patient transport. These groups were identified through feedback from the assessment centre, our staff, direct patient queries and a range of organisations including Healthwatch Barnet.

This feedback was taken on board and we were able to make some amendments to capture these patients, while ensuring we continued to provide patient transport for those with a medical need(s) and no other way to get to hospital without the support of patient transport

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Healthwatch Barnet for all their support.

Conclusion

Healthwatch Barnet will continue to receive and monitor any feedback about hospital transport and liaise with RFL if we are concerned about the issues.

The following links contain further information about hospital transport.

[Royal Free London Hospital Transport](#)
[NHS Guidance on Hospital Transport](#)
[Refund of Hospital Transport Costs](#)

Royal Free London can be contacted on telephone number 020 3758 2000

About Healthwatch

Healthwatch Barnet is an independent charity and part of a national network led by Healthwatch England, which was established through the Health and Social Care Act in 2012, to give service users of health and social care services a powerful voice both locally and nationally. We are the independent voice for people's views on Barnet services, both good and bad. We listen to local people and feedback patient experience and liaise with local commissioners and decision makers, in order to improve services.

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