Introduction

We know that centralising services on one hospital site can make travelling difficult for some patients and their families.

This was confirmed when the National Clinical Advisory Team visited our area in January and was further reinforced throughout the public consultation which took place between 20 May and 11 August when we heard from a number of people how these proposed changes would cause a problem for them in terms of getting to hospital.

This document outlines the actions which have been taken by your local health service to address the issues you have raised. Though the North East Ambulance Service was not one of the organisations holding the consultation they are clearly a vital part of your local health service so we have included a section on how the service is planning for these changes.

We have also included a section about the transport arrangements which are being put into place to support staff working at North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust because this was raised by some people during the consultation.

We would like to thank Healthwatch in Hartlepool, Stockton and Durham for their contribution to this work because they have represented patients and families throughout and worked with us to develop this plan.

This plan will come into place straightaway. It will be reviewed after three months and will continue to be refined and developed as the new arrangements settle in.
You should always call 999 for an ambulance if you or someone else you know is seriously ill or injured. This will not change.

Examples of medical emergencies include, but are not limited to, chest pain, difficulty in breathing, unconsciousness or severe loss of blood. There are others and if you are in doubt, you should call 999.

The North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) aims to reach these types of emergencies in eight minutes in three-quarters of all incidents. This target of 75% in eight minutes trust-wide for the year is set by the Department of Health and it is the toughest response time standard of all ambulance services anywhere in the world.

In the Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees area, there have been 5,700 emergencies which fell within this standard, known as red calls, between April and July 2013. The ambulance service reached 4,500 of these incidents in eight minutes or faster. That is 78.95% of incidents reached in eight minutes compared to the national minimum standard of 75%.

Neither NEAS, nor the clinical commissioning groups who are responsible for paying for the ambulance service, will allow 999 performance to fall below the 75% standard set by the Department of Health.

There are currently 28 paramedics and a further 42 ambulance technicians, urgent care and support staff providing emergency care and urgent transport in the Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees area. In 2012, NEAS announced plans to introduce an additional double-crew paramedic ambulance to cover this area in response to existing demands and relocate some of the rapid response paramedic cars and urgent care transport ambulances. The change, due to be implemented later this year, will help to maintain response time standards across the area.

The ambulance service anticipates that a small number of patients previously taken to the University Hospital of Hartlepool will now be taken to the University Hospital of North Tees. On these occasions, when a slightly longer journey to hospital takes a paramedic crew out of the Hartlepool or Easington area, the nearest available ambulance will move to a standby point to maintain 999 cover. This already happens across the region, which is why you may have seen ambulances parked in lay-bys, flyovers and beside roundabouts providing maximum medical cover when other crews are responding to 999 incidents.

A small number of patients in County Durham may also be affected where Hartlepool was their nearest hospital. On these occasions, the clinical decision of the paramedic will determine which hospital they are taken to in an emergency situation.

NEAS has been working with its CCG partners about the impact of providing the additional cover. This is to ensure that the service is able to provide resources to cover the extended time that will be required of crews that would previously have gone to Hartlepool.

Patients can help as well by not placing demand on ambulance services unnecessarily. When it’s less urgent than 999, alternatives include visiting or calling your GP or talking to your local pharmacist. If you are not sure what help you need, there is also a new number 111, which is free to call – including mobiles - and open 24-hours a day, seven days a week. Callers to this number will be assessed and given advice or directed to the service that can best help them straightaway.
Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees CCG and Durham Dales, Easington and Sedgefield CCG

Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees CCG and Durham Dales, Easington and Sedgefield CCG are committed to providing high quality transport services to all patients at the point of need. To meet this need the CCGs commission a number of services.

999 blue light ambulances are provided by the North East Ambulance Service 24/7 for any patient requiring emergency medical care and who may require transportation to hospital for further treatment.

For those patients who are medically unable to get to and from their hospital appointments or inpatient stay, the CCGs fund free patient transport from a host of organisations to provide a flexible service to those that need it. This transport is provided by a variety of providers including North East Ambulance Service and some private transport providers. The CCGs will review this provision to determine what is required by patients and appropriate services will be commissioned.

As defined nationally, the CCGs will reimburse the costs of travel to hospitals or other NHS-funded treatment or diagnostic tests for those patients who meet the qualifying criteria detailed on the NHS Choices website:

http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcosts/Pages/Travelcosts.aspx

In Durham Dales, Easington and Sedgefield the CCG is talking to the council about whether it can improve bus routes and accessibility for patients and visitors. The Travel Response Centre at Durham City Council continues to operate pre-bookable services between hospitals and other destinations. This service is available for any resident of County Durham to use.

The CCGs will continue to work with NEAS to ensure their response times for planned and unplanned journeys are within the contracted times and will continue to monitor the impact on patients.

Hartlepool and Stockton-on-Tees CCG and Durham Dales, Easington and Sedgefield CCG are assured that this comprehensive transport provision offers a quality and effective service to all patients and will continue to do so following the changes within North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust.
North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust

Providing appropriate transport services for patients, visitors and staff is vital to the success of centralising services. Extensive work has taken place and is on-going to ensure those affected by the service transfers have access to appropriate transport or car parking.

The trust set up a transportation sub-group including two governor representatives. The group has been working hard to improve transport arrangements which can be put into place if the proposals go ahead.

The trust has a policy of never leaving a patient stranded. So, for example, staff will always ask a patient brought in by ambulance how they are going to get home, especially in the later evening when transport is not available. If the patient has no way of getting home the trust will help with one of its transport schemes.

The foundation trust worked with its partners on:

• a patient journey exercise, led by Healthwatch, so that the trust and commissioners can appreciate the challenges of getting to hospital by public transport.

• an exercise to see what other transport is available that local people may not know about. This includes volunteer driver and community schemes which already exist.

• a phased implementation to minimise the inconvenience to patients and their relatives and make the transition smoother. In other words, the changes will take place throughout October, they won't all happen on one day.

From 7 October no more emergency medical patients will be admitted to the emergency assessment unit at the University Hospital of Hartlepool. Instead medical patients will be taken to the University Hospital of North Tees.

By 16 October some patients will need to be transferred by ambulance from the University Hospital of Hartlepool to the University Hospital of North Tees but the vast majority will have been treated and discharged during that time.
The sub-acute unit at the University Hospital of Hartlepool

Some patients from Hartlepool or Easington, who were admitted to the University Hospital of North Tees for assessment, tests and treatment could be transferred to the sub-acute unit at the University Hospital of Hartlepool.

This will make travelling easier for people who wish to visit loved ones. These patients will be people who are not yet well enough to go home but do not need to see a doctor every day or have any further tests or investigations such as CT scans.

Trust transport schemes

• The trust already has its own same day ambulance service to transport patients home after a stay in hospital. This service will be reviewed and revised alongside all transport arrangements.

• Additional shuttle buses running between the hospital sites. As well as the current eight-seater minibus the trust has two 17-seater buses which will run regularly between the two hospitals. The buses are free and can be booked by phoning the trust’s service desk on 01429 522550. If you are travelling with a child please mention this when booking.

• The trust has set up a volunteer driver scheme for people who need help getting to appointments. The first group of volunteers has now been trained. People can find out more about the service by ring the trust’s service desk on 01429 522550.

• Looking at appointment times to make them more convenient for patients. The committee is working with other people in the trust to look at appointment times and theatre sessions to see if these can be changed or patients offered times which are easier for them to get to. Patient should discuss any worries or concerns about transport at their pre-assessment visit so that staff can tell them about schemes such as the trust’s volunteer driver scheme.

• The trust has negotiated a discount with its taxi provider 23 Taxis for patients or relatives travelling to appointments or visiting relatives.

• The trust has applied to Stockton Borough Council for additional temporary car parking space at the University Hospital of North Tees site.

• People receiving certain welfare benefits may be able to get help with travel costs under the Department of Health’s Help with Hospital Transport Costs scheme. More information is available at http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcosts/Pages/Travelcosts.aspx or by asking at the trust’s cashier’s offices.
North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust has reviewed its travel policy to be ready for the changes.

The trust has a duty to reduce carbon emissions, traffic congestion and parking requirements and would prefer staff who need to travel between sites to do so using the free shuttle buses. The trust is putting into place:

- a free park and ride facility for staff affected by the changes.
- a car sharing scheme for staff with guaranteed reserved parking and discounted cost arrangements.
- an enhanced car park management system to maximise car parking capacity.
- additional shuttle buses (detailed opposite).
- different shift patterns for staff, where possible, to enable them to get across sites in time for work.

In summary

All of the organisations mentioned in this plan have been working hard to ensure patients, visitors and staff needs are covered as far as they possibly can in terms of transport.

Healthwatch has been working with our organisations to represent the views of patients. They are working with us to get an understanding of the challenges faced by some people when travelling for their health appointments. We are indebted to them for the work they have been doing.

In addition to the information above, there are some useful sites people can use when planning a journey, whether it is by private or public transport. See our travel information page overleaf.
IMPORTANT INFORMATION

For chest pain, difficulty in breathing, a suspected stroke, severe loss of blood or unconsciousness, do not delay. Phone 999 straightaway. DO NOT put the patient in a car to take them to the nearest health facility as this may result in a delay in them getting the treatment they need. They need to go to the nearest hospital which can deal with their particular illness or injury. The ambulance paramedics will decide and take the patient to the best hospital for their needs.

Need help with transport? Do you have a health appointment?

If, because of your medical condition or mobility problems, you feel you need transport to get to your appointment and you are registered with a GP surgery within the Tees area contact Transport Information Services on 0345 045 0160 Monday - Friday, 9am - 5pm.

If you are registered with a GP surgery within the East Durham or Sedgefield area contact the Travel Response Centre on 0191 383 5383 Monday - Thursday, 8.30am - 5pm Friday, 8.30am - 4.30pm.

You will be asked a number of questions to see if you are eligible to have transport provided for you. You will need to apply at least 2-3 weeks before your appointment to arrange for transport.

There is also a volunteer driver scheme bookable through the Social Resource Centre in Ferryhill. You can contact the centre on 01740 658880. There is a charge for this service, depending on the length of the journey.

If not, there are ways North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust can help

If you have a very early or late appointment, or getting to your appointment is going to be difficult, you could:

• contact the trust’s volunteer driver scheme by calling 01429 522550
• book a seat on the shuttle bus by phoning 01429 522550. You can use the park and ride at the University Hospital of Hartlepool. If you are travelling with a child please mention this when booking.
• book a taxi from 23 Taxis who will give you a discount. You can contact 23 Taxis by phoning 01429 232323

Do you have a disability? If so, the trust will work with you to find the best arrangement to fit your needs.

Do you receive benefits? You may be entitled for help with your travel costs. Find out more at www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcosts/Pages/Travelcosts.aspx or phone the trust’s cashiers office on 01642 617617.

Travelling by car? More car parking spaces have been created at the University Hospital of North Tees.

Car parking charges

• First 15 minutes - free
• 0 - 2 hours - £3
• 2 - 4 hours - £3.30
• Over 4 hours - £4

The trust has season tickets for people who need to come to hospital regularly.
• Weekly unlimited visits - £15
• Monthly pass £25

The trust does not expect anyone to spend more than £25 on car parking. Please ask for more details at the service desk near the main concourse or pick up a ticket near the blue machine.

Pabling is free for patients receiving treatment for cancer at the University Hospital of Hartlepool or the University Hospital of North Tees. Please ask at the ward or department where you are receiving your treatment and they will help you complete the appropriate paperwork.

Travelling by bus? You can get information from:

• Stagecoach Bus - www.stagecoachbus.com or call Hartlepool 01429 267 092 / Stockton 01642 60 2112
• Arriva - www.arrivabus.co.uk or call Arriva customer service 0844 800 44 11 or Traveline 0871 200 22 33

Need to plan your journey? You can get information from: www.transportdirect.info or www.connectteesvalley.com