

From the Office of David Flory CBE  
Deputy NHS Chief Executive



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To: PCT Cluster Chief Executives

CC: SHA Cluster Chief Executives  
Acute Trust Chief Executives  
Ambulance Trust Chief Executives  
Chief Executive, Care Quality Commission  
Chief Executive, Monitor

## **AMBULANCE HANDOVER DELAYS**

Dear Colleague

There is increasing concern about the ongoing problem of patient handovers from ambulances to hospitals. While this is not a widespread problem, the unacceptably long handover times in a number of places is sufficient to warrant our focused attention. There should be no doubt that the delays have an adverse impact on patients' experience of the service and may increase risk to patient safety. We must therefore take a "zero tolerance" approach to handover delays, and recognise that there is a joint responsibility on ambulance and hospital trusts to ensure such delays are minimised.

It is, of course, also important to consider the safety of any initiatives designed to reduce delays. For example, increasing the number of stages to a handover (eg via an ambulance officer or handover nurse) may result in loss of clinically important information from the ambulance crew, who have seen and treated the patient, to the person treating the patient in A&E.


Patient handover is reliant on strong collaboration across the system. Some areas have seen commissioners, acute trusts, and ambulance services, with support from their SHA, take proactive steps to address this issue. Examples include bringing together those organisations where handover delays have been consistently problematic, and consider in partnership how to address the issue and share demonstrated good practice. Peter Bradley, Chief Executive, London Ambulance NHS Trust and DH National Ambulance Advisor has asked each Ambulance Trust to ensure they arrange these meetings with their local stakeholders in the immediate future to undertake

this joint improvement. I have asked for feedback from Peter from those meetings to understand how the Department can support the NHS in eradicating these delays.

I expect local commissioners to take a keen interest in those organisations that fail to deliver prompt handovers and for them to exercise whatever contractual penalties are available to them. There are no new standards to deliver and no new targets imposed. However, the expectation continues to be that handovers occur within 15 minutes of ambulances' arrival at the A&E department.

It is timely to remind organisations that there is a "Duty of Cooperation" to ensure effective working at the interface of health care organisations. This is also reflected in the Terms of Authorisation with which Foundation Trusts and aspirant Foundation Trusts are required to comply. Where local handover delays continue to be problematic, both Monitor and the Care Quality Commission have the responsibility to assure compliance with this duty and I have encouraged them to take appropriate action where organisations fail to do so.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Flory". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style. There is a small dot at the end of the signature, which appears to be a period or a flourish.

**David Flory**  
**Deputy NHS Chief Executive**