

A report about:
The Welsh Ambulance Service Trust
How they support emergency patients to get
to hospital



Easy read version



Healthcare Inspectorate Wales (HIW) are independent. HIW look at all health services in Wales.



Welsh Ambulance Service Trust (WAST) are in charge of all ambulances in Wales.



There were a lot of worries about how long people had to wait for an ambulance.



HIW looked at how people were looked after when they needed an ambulance.



Welsh Ambulance have 3 centres to manage emergencies. These are called **Emergency Medical Service Clinical Contact Centres.**



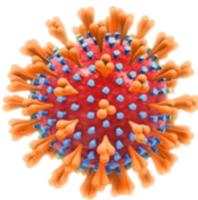
HIW looked at:



- How the centres work.



- Staff in the centres and how they are supported to do their jobs.



We did this work before COVID-19. COVID-19 and lockdown have had a big impact on services.



This is our Easy Read report.

You can read the full report here:

www.hiw.org.uk



What we did



We looked at 3 main things:



- How centres made decisions about patients



- Staff and how they are looked after



- How the centres are run



We talked to staff and managers and we did a survey.

We looked at a lot of information about how the centres have been working.



What we found out



Making decisions for patients



Emergency calls like **999** are answered by the centres.



The Call handler asks questions to find out how serious the emergency is. This is called **triage**.



Calls are put into 3 levels.

RED

Patients might die if they are not treated quickly. Most patients should be seen in 8 minutes.

AMBER

Serious risks and illness that need to be treated but not as quickly as RED patients.

GREEN

Not serious illness or risk. The patient could be helped by a doctor or other health professional.



There are a lot of calls.



Most calls are AMBER.



Concerns and worries



Ambulances and other services are sent to RED patients quickly. This can mean there are not enough ambulances for AMBER patients.



AMBER patients sometimes have to wait a very long time.



This is frustrating and stressful for staff, patients and callers.



Conditions like heart attacks or strokes need to be treated quickly to help the patient get better.

This does not always happen. There are not always enough ambulances to respond to calls quickly.



The main reason for this is that sometimes it takes a long time for a patient to be handed over to hospitals. This means ambulances have to wait a long time and there are not enough to go to new emergencies.

Welsh Ambulance Service Trust should:

Think about how to make sure patients with:



- Heart attacks
- Strokes

are treated quickly.

Think about how AMBER patients are seen quicker by ambulance.



Checking patients are ok



AMBER and GREEN patients can wait a long time for an ambulance or other response.



The centre staff call back to make sure they are ok.



If a patient gets worse they may need to be seen quicker.



Concerns and worries



There are not always enough people to call patients back to check they are okay.



Trained health staff support for the centres



The centres have trained medical staff. They can be nurses or paramedics. They give clinical support to the centres.



The clinical staff:



- Check the calls waiting for an ambulance



- Give advice about patients

- Send someone to support the patient instead of an ambulance



- Treat the person by phone



They can decide to give a patient a more urgent response.



They can save an ambulance going to someone who doesn't need it.



Concerns and worries



Sometimes clinical support is not in the same building.



Sometimes there isn't enough clinical support and this means long delays for the patient and the centres.



Welsh Ambulance Service Trust should:

- Look at other ways of checking patients on the call waiting list
- Look at the new way North Wales centre works with clinical support to see if other centres can do the same.



Planning for very busy times



When the ambulance service is very busy they cannot respond to everyone in good time.



There is a plan to make sure the most urgent patients are still treated quickly.



There are 4 levels to the plan at the worst level ambulances can only go to RED calls.



This means there are fewer ambulances for less serious patients.



When this happens the call staff are told what to tell callers and patients.



Concerns and worries



Staff did not always know why the level went up or down.



The plan says that senior managers need to be at the centre when it is very busy. This does not always happen.



What the call handlers are told to say doesn't always help. They would like to be clearer about waiting times. This will help callers and patients understand what is happening.

Welsh Ambulance Service Trust should:



- Think about telling callers more information about the waiting times.
- Make sure that the plan to cope with busy times is being followed every time.
- Make sure senior managers go to the centres when it is very busy.



Public awareness



Ambulances are an emergency service.



There are a lot of non-emergency calls to the ambulance service.



Non-emergency calls take time to answer and might mean an ambulance is sent that is not needed.



Some members of the public expect too much from the ambulance service.



This means:



- People call back when there is no need



- Some people can be abusive to call staff.



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Welsh Ambulance Service Trust should:

Agree with Welsh Government when it is okay to not send an ambulance to people at low risk.

Think about how to teach people:



- About the ambulance service
- When to call 999
- When not to call 999



Workforce



The staff in the centres are dedicated and work hard.



The work of the centres is hard and stressful.



Concerns and worries



Most staff think there are not enough staff to do the job.



There are more pressures on the staff. This is because there are more calls and ambulances get held up at hospitals.



There are a lot of staff off sick. This is maybe because of the stressful work.



A lot of staff are not happy at work. Some staff told us that they are unhappy with the quality of the service they are able to provide.



A lot of staff leave. This means there are a lot of new staff.

New staff don't know the job as well.



Some managers sometimes have to do more than one job because there are not enough staff in the centres.



Staff shortages are worse at weekends and at night.



Welsh Ambulance Service Trust should:

- Give staff support at work to improve attendance.



- Have a good plan to make sure there are enough staff for each shift.



Staff team ideas

Calling patients and callers back to check they are okay is not always easy because staff are very busy.

These calls can be frustrating and stressful for staff and callers.



The Welsh Ambulance Service Trust should:

- Finish the review of how staff call back patients and callers.
- Think about how to pay for more staff to do the call backs.
- Think about what staff do now and how their jobs could be better.
- Think about more ways to make the call back system work better.
- Look at how staff can share their ideas for the service. Make sure they are thought about and tell the staff about how you used their ideas.





Centre staff and new workers



Welsh Ambulance Service Trust are looking at staffing and jobs.



Some new call handler staff joined recently but their jobs were for six months only.



Some other staff were also in temporary jobs in the service and had been for a long time.



Staff are not sure what the changes will be for the service.



The Welsh Ambulance Service Trust should:

Make sure they:

- Ask staff about the new staff plan
- Think about these ideas.



Ambulance resources



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Welsh Government have said
Ambulances should wait at hospitals no
more than 15 minutes.



Staff told us:



- Ambulances took longer at hospitals



- There is sometimes a queue of ambulances



- There are often too many ambulances at hospitals and not enough for other emergency calls.



Centres can ask hospitals to let the ambulances leave. This does not happen often.



Ambulances cannot go to new patients if they are stuck at the hospital.

The Welsh Ambulance Service Trust should:



- Talk to everyone involved to find a way to stop the queues at hospitals.



Staff training



Most staff have done their training.



Staff want more training to help them do their jobs.



Staff are worried about less training for new workers.



There is not enough training about mental health and suicide.



The Welsh Ambulance Service Trust should:

- Start a training plan to help the staff do their jobs.
- The board should make sure the plan happens.



Staff monitoring and appraisals



Appraisals are meetings with staff and managers to check how well they are doing their jobs.



Most staff have meetings with managers to check how they are doing.



Managers say they don't have time or training to do appraisals well.



The Welsh Ambulance Service Trust should:

- Make sure staff and managers have enough time to complete appraisals.



- Make sure managers have training to do appraisals.

- Check with the International Academy of Emergency Dispatch to see if any improvements can be made at the centres.



Staff well being and support



Most staff thought they had good support.



There is extra help for mental health.



Worries and concerns



Some staff thought that the office they worked in was not good.



Some staff thought they did not have good computers and equipment.



Senior managers were not always there to support staff at the centres.

The Welsh Ambulance Service Trust should:



- Look at the equipment and offices to make sure they are the best for a healthy staff team.
- Make sure senior managers support staff at the centres.
- Make sure staff can speak about their concerns if they want to.



How the centres are run



Staff were happy with managers locally.



Senior managers did not communicate well with the staff.



The Welsh Ambulance Service Trust should:

- Make sure there is better communication with senior managers and staff



Planning for when things go wrong



The Ambulance Trust have a plan for things going wrong.



The plan talks about the things we found out about like:



- Ambulances being stuck at the hospital



- Not enough staff



- Staff sickness



- Problems with the offices



Staff have a computer form to report when things go wrong.



Worries and concerns



The Ambulance Trust did not think enough about staff training.



Not all staff know when to report something going wrong.



Staff did not think reports completed when things go wrong are properly looked at by Trust managers.

The Welsh Ambulance Service Trust should:



- Think again about what could go wrong without good training for staff.
- Make sure staff have good training on reporting when things go wrong.
- Make sure everyone reports if something goes wrong and make sure you tell the person what happened when they reported the problem.



What happens now?



The Welsh Ambulance Service Trust need to think about our report.



The Trust must write a plan to say how they will do all of the things we said need to improve.



We will check if they have done everything.



We found some things we need to look at again:



- Ambulance delays at hospitals.



- Staffing numbers, training and keeping good staff.