

Hospital Transport

Summary Report

July
2016





Contents

Introduction.....	2
Methodology	3
Our Findings	3
Question 1 - Approximately how many hospital appointments have your residents attended in the last 6 months?	3
Question 2 - Have any residents' appointments had to be cancelled/rescheduled due to not being able to book Hospital Transport?	3
Question 3 - How often do you have to re-arrange hospital appointments due to other transport issues?	4
Question 4 - Are you satisfied with the quality of service the hospital transport provided?.....	4
Question 5 - Do you have residents who do not qualify for hospital transport who have difficulty in getting to hospital appointments?	5
Question 6 - If you have any further comments you wish to make about transport of residents to hospital appointments, please give details here:	5
Summary	6
Recommendations	7
Recognition	7
Contact us	8

Introduction

Public concerns have been raised with independent health & social care consumer champion Healthwatch Torbay about transporting patients from residential/nursing homes to hospital appointments. Issues related to accessibility, times of appointments and cost to patients who had to fund their own transport. The cost issue was a major concern as many residents only have a minimum weekly allowance of £24.90 (as of May 2016) for all expenses, which has to include fares to hospital appointments. Healthwatch Torbay embarked on further consultation with residential/nursing home residents to gather further information.



Methodology

A survey was sent to all residential/nursing homes in February 2016 to gather further feedback and identify any issues or concerns with current arrangements relating to Hospital Transport.

33 responses were received and their comments were collated and analysed.

Our Findings

The following feedback was collated from responses received from residential/nursing homes:

Question 1 - Approximately how many hospital appointments have your residents attended in the last 6 months?

One answered 'regularly'. The other responses varied but the average number of visits equated to 12 visits over a 6 month period.

Question 2 - Have any residents' appointments had to be cancelled/rescheduled due to not being able to book Hospital Transport?

Yes - 10 (30.3%)

No - 17 (51.5%)

Comments included:

"We have either cancelled or rescheduled appointments due to wheelchair taxis not being available at appointment times."

"Resident needed wheelchair access transport. Only one taxi available as resident no longer allowed hospital transport. If the hospital visit is booked + the taxi is unavailable, we have had to wait at least a week sometimes for another appointment."

"Usually appointments are too early i.e before 8.30am or too late i.e after 15.30pm when hospital transport is not always available."



“The most recent examples is a resident had to have a wheelchair taxi to a hospital appointment and it cost £36 (£18 each way). This is a lot of money.”

“We were unable to use a wheelchair taxi due to none being available as it was the school run. So appointment has to be rescheduled.”

“Too expensive and due to this being an issue, we now have our own transport (mini-bus) but we still have to find a driver.”

Question 3 - How often do you have to re-arrange hospital appointments due to other transport issues?

NEVER - 10 (30.3%)

SELDOM - 11 (33.3%)

FREQUENTLY - 8 (24.2%)

Question 4 - Are you satisfied with the quality of service of the hospital transport provided?

Yes - 13 (39.4%)

No - 8 (24.2%)

Comments included:

“We transport our residents ourselves as hospital transport is not frequent enough for our residents to be comfortable. They have, in the past been out for 6 hours for a 30 min appointment which is not helpful to someone with a sever disability.”

“Although we are no longer allowed to use hospital transport for residents hospital visits, we would be happy if there was a small charge for the hospital transport - at least it is a good service and is better than just one wheelchair taxi in the bay.”

“When the actual transport does arrive and is used, the staff and service is good, the issues are around the criteria when care homes are booking transport, there is no clear notification of who is eligible and they don't take dementia into account and also residents using wheelchairs.”



Question 5 - Do you have residents who do not qualify for hospital transport who have difficulty in getting to hospital appointments?

Yes - 17 (51.5%)

No - 8 (24.2%)

Comments included:

“Immobile residents, on wheelchairs, family unable to pay for private transport or unable to escort their relatives”

“All use a wheelchair OUTSIDE of the home but still do not qualify for free transport”

“As previously stated. Only one taxi locally who accommodates wheelchair users. 99% of our residents are wheelchair users.”

“Due to wheelchair taxis being needed and they are tied up due to school runs and trips out with other disability groups”

“All our residents are very frail, frequently palliative care, but for differing reasons they do need to attend hospital/podiatry appointments. We have very few private residents, which means most people only have £24.90 personal allowance per week. Many do not have families that would take them. They are almost always in a wheelchair.”

Question 6 - If you have any further comments you wish to make about transport of residents to hospital appointments, please give details here:

Comments included:

“We had one resident that needed to urgently see the vascular team but due to no transport they said she would have to rebook and wait another week - so getting appointments is hard. Because her daughter stood up for her mum and said it wasn't good enough luckily they gave her an appointment the next day - not everyone would feel able to stand up like this.”

“Which means hospital care service is not suitable, but with a fee per person, if the person is paying for 2, as they need an escort, this is nearly as bad as a taxi. Taxi fare from us to Torbay is £44 - £48. This is 2 weeks personal allowance. Our residents are becoming more complex and frailer, but they are not often requiring



oxygen. This is the main criteria for patient transport service (PTS). I feel anyone living in a nursing home should fit the criteria for PTS.”

“It would be good if all care/nursing homes could have a written list of what conditions qualify for hospital transport and also if there could be some way of care/nursing homes being able to use hospital transport for their residents even if there was a small fee.”

“In last months is more difficult to organise transport for residents, new criteria would not allowed to have hospital transport for those who always need it in the past. This is a difficult situation for elderly, poorly, dependent people, residents who are immobile and on wheelchair; those residents do not understand or accept charges or just simply cannot pay for private taxis.”

Summary

The following is a brief summary of the main points raised via residential/nursing homes feedback:

- Where hospital transport is available for patients, most respondents were satisfied with the service.
- Some patients are not attending appointments due to the cost of transport.
- Cost of transport, i.e. private taxis, is a major issue for patients who only have the state minimum of £24.90 per week and where relatives are unable to assist.
- Cost of transport is an issue for the residential/ nursing homes and some have had to provide their own transport.
- There is a lack of availability of wheelchair accessible transport in general and especially for appointments at times when taxis are pre-booked for 'school runs'.



Recommendations

Based on the feedback data and summary information, Healthwatch Torbay have put together the following recommendations:

- **Recommendation 1** - All residential/nursing homes need to be made aware of the current policy for Hospital Transport Eligibility Criteria.
- **Recommendation 2** - All residential/nursing homes should be made aware of the current policy on financial assistance available to their residents, especially those who only qualify for the £24.90 per week allowance.
- **Recommendation 3** - Further detailed work needs to be undertaken to ascertain the full extent of patients not being able to afford to get to appointments and the consequences for these patients.
- **Recommendation 4** - Further detailed work needs to be undertaken to ascertain if there is adequate suitable alternative transport providers within the bay to accommodate the level of demand.
- **Recommendation 5** - The hospitals should consider ways to ensure residents who qualify for Hospital Transport service are able to make an appointment when this service is operating and not outside their operating hours.

Recognition

Healthwatch Torbay would like to thank the staff of the residential/nursing homes who gave their time to respond to our questionnaire.



Contact us

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