



ASSOCIATION OF
COMMUNITY HEALTH COUNCILS
FOR ENGLAND & WALES

David Lammy
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health
Richmond House
London
SW1A 0AA

23/12/02

Dear David,

Inappropriate use of Emergency Ambulances for Dangerously Ill Patients

I am sure that we were both very concerned to read the article in the Sunday Times yesterday (22/12/02) – 'Sick kept in ambulances in bed crisis'.

Although we have been aware for some time that ambulances sometimes cannot deliver patients to A and E Departments, because of capacity problems e.g. shortages of trolleys or beds for the transfer of patients, we have not been aware of the alleged deliberate exclusion of patients for the purpose of complying with the Department's four hour target for A and E.

As you know ACHCEW and CHCs across the country have been closely monitoring trolley waits through Casualty Watch for some years and have seen a gradual shortening of waiting times in most hospitals. It is therefore alarming that despite the very high priority given to A and E by this Government, that we are now experiencing what appears to be a very serious deterioration of the situation.

Could we please meet urgently to discuss the allegations of warehousing of patients in ambulances and the steps, which the Government will take to immediately stamp out this practice for whatever reason it has been introduced? Could you also arrange for your officials to provide me with the following information as soon as possible?

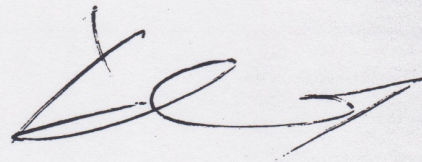
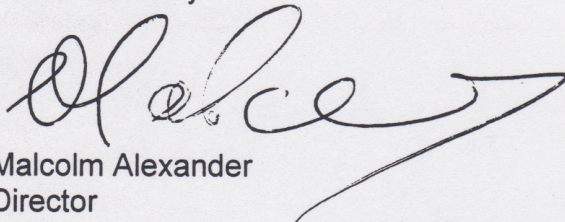
- Are NHS Trusts required to keep a record of patients kept waiting in ambulances outside A and E Departments and how long they wait for?
- If so can you provide data to ACHCEW on the locations of these waits and the length of time waited outside A and E Departments by patients?
- Has the Department required Trusts to analyse the causes of these waits? If so what are the causes?

- Does current information suggest to you that the problem is caused by shortages of beds? If so what action is being taken?
- What action will be taken if a Trust is found to have refused access to emergencies in order to massage four-hour targets?

CHCs and ACHCEW have fought long and hard to reduce the length of trolley waits and to persuade the Government to introduce realistic targets that are patient centred. The four hour 'total wait' standard is in our view a major step forward and we are committed to preventing this standard being compromised in any way, anywhere in the country.

I look forward to meeting you to discuss this matter at the earliest opportunity.

Yours sincerely



Malcolm Alexander
Director

Copy to: Alan Hartley, Graham Girvan, Sally Brearley, Donald Roy.