

Mark Drakeford AC / AM  
Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol  
Minister for Health and Social Services



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

Our Ref: MB/MD/0579/14

Nick Ramsay AM

[nick.ramsay@wales.gov.uk](mailto:nick.ramsay@wales.gov.uk)

17 February 2014

Dear Nick,

I am writing as a follow-up to Business Minister's Questions of 28 January during which you both asked for a statement on actions undertaken to improve ambulance response times in the Rhondda Cynon Taf (RCT) area.

Following the recommendations of the McClelland Review Cwm Taf UHB will become unambiguously accountable for provision of emergency ambulance services for the Merthyr and RCT localities, when new planning and commissioning arrangements are established from 1 April 2014. I expect emergency ambulance services to be embedded as a key part of the unscheduled care system in the area, with Health Board-led clinical services integrating seamlessly with Trust services. For example, this may result in greater use of pre-hospital and community based resources such as Minor Injuries Units by ambulance Trust staff to reduce unnecessary pressure on busy Emergency Departments.

However, I note the deterioration in response time performance within RCT for December 2013 which was affected by increased pressure in the south east region, with unpredictable and 'spikey' demand causing random peaks in the number of acutely ill patients requiring an emergency ambulance response. This is a reflection of pressure across the whole unscheduled care system and impacted on the ability of the ambulance service to respond to calls within eight minutes.

Historically, achievement of the eight minute target has been challenging across the Cwm Taf University Health Board (UHB) locality and there are a number of contributory factors for this including the geography/topography of the region which makes it difficult to travel to isolated communities quickly; the increased acuity of calls in the region because of an ageing population and the legacy of employment in industry; and challenges with recruiting paramedics in the area.

In spite of this, there have been a number of positive improvements across the area, all of which contribute to a wider, more sustainable unscheduled care system. These include:

- Significantly reduced levels of patient handover delays, with only two patients waiting over an hour for handover at both A&E sites in the Cwm Taf UHB area in January;

- Nearly 90% of patients were handed over to the care of A&E staff within 15 minutes in January – the best performance in Wales;
- Trust team based working and a new management structure;
- Development of additional care pathways; and
- Enhanced use of Community First responders.

Additionally, WAST is currently undertaking a review of operational rotas and positioning of vehicles using a process to predict 'average peak demand' times for emergency and urgent calls and matching crew numbers to activity. This work will enhance rapid response vehicle and emergency ambulance positions across the area to provide timely clinical support for life threatening emergencies, and improve both the response and clinical outcomes for as many patients as possible.

All of these improvements have been put in place during the last 12 months and need time to come to fruition. The developments are supported by good working relationships between Cwm Taf UHB and the Trust, and the foundation is in place for an improving unscheduled care system for the area.

While a timely response is important for immediately life threatening conditions, it should be acknowledged that the eight minute target is only weakly backed by clinical evidence. It is, therefore, encouraging that nearly 70% of patients in the RCT area received a response within eleven minutes in December despite an increase in pressure on the ambulance service. This is testament to the hard work of staff who deliver under challenging conditions with little credit. We will continue to monitor the situation closely to ensure an equitable service is provided to the people of RCT.

Best wishes



**Mark Drakeford AC / AM**

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol  
Minister for Health and Social Services