

UK COVID-19 INQUIRY

SUBMISSIONS FOR THE HEARING IN MODULE 3 OF THE UK COVID-19 INQUIRY ON 27 SEPTEMBER 2023

MADE ON BEHALF OF THE INDEPENDENT AMBULANCE ASSOCIATION ('IAA')

Introduction

1. The IAA is a not-for-profit trade association representing independent ambulance providers across the UK. IAA Members in England are regulated by the Care Quality Commission. The IAA itself provides regular and structured guidance for its members including seminars and webinars, podcasts and best practice. It contributes to the work of key stakeholders including NHS England and the Department for Transport through Expert Advisory Groups and similar. There are currently over 50 member organisations within the IAA, ranging from small companies employing fewer than 10 people to those employing more than 500 staff.
2. Each year the NHS funds the transport of between 11-12 million patients, accumulating a total of 140 million patient miles. More than half of all NHS patient transfers are provided by independent ambulance providers.
3. During the Covid-19 pandemic the NHS's reliance on independent ambulance providers increased dramatically. In particular there was with a significant and wholly unforeseen increase in demand for non-emergency transport service providers to pivot to prioritise Covid patients and 999 services. As a consequence of this, IAA members have gained extensive first-hand experience of the impact of Covid-19 on patients and staff, and the many issues this presented.
4. Members are in a position to provide the Inquiry with details of their experiences and practical recommendations for the future, including the use and availability of specialist equipment and recommendations for co-ordination between stakeholders for a more effective response to such an event in the future.

Submissions on provisional list of issues

5. Given the close involvement of our members in the provision of care to patients including the elderly and vulnerable during the pandemic we believe that we will be able to provide valuable information to the Inquiry in addressing most of the issues identified by the Inquiry team.
6. In particular we invite the Inquiry team to consider the following amendments to the Provisional List of Issues 4(a):
 - We suggest that either Issue 4(a)(iii) be extended, or a further subheading (v) be added, to consider *‘systems in place to address variations in demand for ambulances, including for non-emergency patient transport services’*.

The reason we suggest this is that one of the main concerns identified by our members is the lack of a comprehensive and clear line of communication between stakeholders in advance of significant changes in demand, resulting in uncertainty among our members and an inability to adjust and adapt effectively. One suggestion is the introduction of a permanent national team within the NHS providing oversight and leadership for non-emergency patient transfer services, which we believe would go some way in providing a remedy for this problem.

- We invite the Inquiry to consider a further subheading *‘classification and clarification of key worker status for ambulance/healthcare employees’*

Members of the IAA faced difficulties arising from ambiguity in the application of “key-worker” status, and delay in clarification or extension of the category. There was a perception that Government was slow, and possibly reluctant, to assign key-worker status to non-NHS staff. That put staff employed by IAA members in a difficult position, keen to work to combat the early impact of the pandemic, but disadvantaged in terms of accessing vaccinations, PPE, testing, and priority shopping, as well as facing a dilemma in making personal choices about what legally they could

do. That inevitably occupied the time and minds of staff who should have been, and wanted to be, focussed on providing support to healthcare services at an important, challenging, and worrying time. We invite the Inquiry to consider the impact in delays to the expansion of key-worker status beyond NHS staff. Alternatively this could be added as a new item under Issue 7¹.

**Richard Jory KC
Chris Harper**

Foundry Chambers (Counsel for the IAA)

11 September 2023

¹ Issue 7: 'Impact of the pandemic on doctors, nurses and other healthcare staff'