

# Sussex Patient Transport Service

## Briefing – April 2016

### 1. Background

On Friday 01 April 2016 a new Patient Transport Service went live across Sussex. The new service is provided by Coperforma, following a robust procurement process led by High Weald Lewes and Havens CCG on behalf of the seven CCGs in Sussex.

The procurement process was initiated by a decision in March 2014 by the South East Coast Ambulance Service (SECAmb) to serve notice on its contract to provide PTS in Sussex beyond the expiry date of 31 March 2015. A one year extension was agreed with SECAmb to continue delivering the service until 31 March 2016; to enable the seven clinical commissioning groups in Sussex to undertake a process of determining a new provider.

A new service specification was developed, informed by widespread public, user, staff and clinical engagement to learn about people's experiences of using PTS and how a new service could meet patients' needs.

However, the standard of service provided by Coperforma during the first few days of the new Sussex Patient Transport Service has not been acceptable and both Coperforma and the Sussex CCGs have issued a public apology to all affected patients.

Local and national media have run coverage highlighting the problems experienced by patients since launch, and the story is the front page of the Guardian newspaper today (Wednesday 13 April 2016).

### 2. Current position

The CCGs across Sussex are taking this situation very seriously and have launched a formal investigation, with Coperforma, into the run-up and start of the new service.

In the first few days, a combination of initial technical hitches and problems with some patient data and journey information created severe delays for some patients and, in some cases, resulted in no transport being provided at all.

This triggered a significant volume of calls to Coperforma's call centres, which in turn created further issues, with patients and staff experiencing long waiting times or being unable to get through to the team.

The CCG teams have worked closely with the transport booking team to make sure any patients affected that were highlighted to us were provided with transport, and we have supported our local NHS services to manage any impact on them. Regular operational teleconferences are taking place between the CCGs across Sussex to monitor the local position, and any on-going impact on our patients.

Coperforma is prioritising the transport of renal and oncology patients. It is working with the CCGs and staff in renal and oncology units to ensure all patients get the transport they need. It is also providing staff at renal units with swift access to the booking hub via a separate, dedicated telephone line, and placing PTS staff in the units to support the booking process.

The CCGs are working closely to support Coperforma in resolving any remaining issues that may affect future transport bookings and patient telephone call waiting times.

### **3. Review and on-going monitoring**

The CCGs are taking this situation very seriously and are working with Coperforma to find solutions as soon as possible, in order to provide the standard of service that Sussex patients expect and deserve.

The CCGs will commence a formal investigation into the launch of the new service, and the CCGs have already requested a full report from Coperforma on call handling/waiting times since 1 April 2016 and the number of journeys missed and patients affected.

We will formally update on these investigations in due course.

### **4. Media reports on a patient death**

There has also been some inaccurate reporting of a patient death as a result of delays by the Patient Transport Service.

A joint investigation by the CCGs and Coperforma has established that no patient died whilst waiting for patient transport during the first week of the new Patient Transport Service.

The log of calls regarding this patient confirms that there was an initial delay in transport arriving, that the transport was re-booked for later that day but subsequently cancelled as the patient's destination could no longer accept him. The patient was transported via blue light ambulance the following morning to the facility where he received treatment.

### **5. Impact on renal patients**

Media reports and some concerns have focused on the impact on renal patients who receive transport for dialysis.

With the launch of the new service, the CCGs have reviewed and updated the Eligibility Criteria that supports the Patient Transport Service, and all patients will need to be assessed to confirm a medical need for transport.

This need for an assessment is a change for renal dialysis patients, as previously they received transport automatically, with clinical staff at the renal dialysis units booking transport on their behalf. However, it was always the CCGs belief that very few if any dialysis patients using transport would no longer be eligible for the service, and following a series of face-to-face engagement sessions run by the CCGs and Coperforma at renal units across Sussex, we can confirm that all renal dialysis patients who were using transport under the previous service have been found eligible for the new service.

The CCGs are apologising to any patients who have been concerned by the update to the eligibility criteria. The purpose of the work on eligibility criteria was to ensure that all NHS patients were treated equitably no matter what medical condition was involved.

### **6. Support for staff**

Some concerns have been raised by members of Patient Transport Service staff. The CCGs acknowledge and appreciate the hard work and dedication shown by all staff in delivering the previous Patient Transport Service, including their on-going commitment during the transition to the new service.

The CCGs worked closely with incumbent PTS management staff and Coperforma throughout the transition to make necessary arrangements for the transfer of all incumbent staff to either Coperforma or one of its transport providers. The terms, conditions and pension rights for staff transferring to new employers were protected under TUPE regulations, and there were no compulsory redundancies.

Coperforma's senior management team are taking allegations of unacceptable standards and working conditions extremely seriously and have launched their own investigation into these concerns.

## **5. Messages for the public**

Through the local, regional and national media, the CCGs are working to reassure patients, carers and members of the public.

Key messages have included:

- We recognise that the first few days of the new non-emergency Sussex Patient Transport Service were not acceptable.
- This is due to a number of complex issues, including problems with data and booking information.
- The Sussex CCGs apologise to all patients and users of the service.
- While some issues do remain, the management and staff of Coperforma have demonstrated a determination to put things right and improve the quality of services being provided to patients.
- We assure you that we are taking this situation very seriously and are working with the new provider Coperforma, and our partners, to ensure the service meets the needs of our population as quickly as possible.
- Because Coperforma are still experiencing a high volume of telephone calls on both their healthcare staff line and patient line - with patients calling to confirm transport booked for several weeks' time – they are asking that telephone calls are only made in relation to transport needed within the next 48hrs as a temporary measure to help alleviate these pressures.

The last key message is particularly important as this will help to support the call centre staff to manage calls relating to transport requests for the same and following day, and reduce the call handling pressure on the team as seen in the initial few days of the service.

**14 April 2016**