

# WELSH HEALTH CIRCULAR



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

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**Issue Date:** 12 February 2007

**Status:** Action

**Title:** All-Wales Protocol for Non-Emergency Patient Transport Eligibility Criteria and the Introduction of Regional Contact Centres to Manage the Booking of Patient Transport in Wales.

**For Action by:** NHS Trust Chief Executives;  
LHB Chief Executives

**Action required** *See paragraph(s) : 3.1 and 3.2*

**For Information to:** See attached list

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**Enclosure(s):** Non-Emergency Patient Transport Eligibility Criteria

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# NON-EMERGENCY PATIENT TRANSPORT

## ALL-WALES PROTOCOL FOR DETERMINING MEDICAL NEED AND THE INTRODUCTION OF REGIONAL CONTACT CENTRES TO MANAGE THE BOOKING OF PATIENT TRANSPORT IN WALES.

### 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This circular is to advise NHS trusts and Local Health Boards of the revised criteria for determining whether a patient has a medical need for free non-emergency patient transport. The revised criteria, which can be found at Annex A, applies only to patient journeys within Wales and first journeys to hospitals in England.
- 1.2 The Department of Health (DH) is currently consulting on changes to patient transport services that will have an impact on the current arrangements for Welsh patients travelling to hospitals in England. The Welsh Assembly Government is in discussions with DH on a number of cross border issues and further guidance will be issued in due course.
- 1.3 This circular also outlines new arrangements for the booking of non-emergency patient transport within Wales through the creation of regional patient transport contact centres.

### 2. BACKGROUND

#### Medical Need Criteria

- 2.1 The Welsh Assembly Government established a working group to look at non-emergency patient transport services in response to the recommendations of the review of community transport "*Community Transport in the Welsh Transport Network*," published in July 2002.
- 2.2 One of the issues identified by the review group was the need to update the definition of medical need, which was contained in a 1992 Welsh Office document entitled "*Ambulance and Other Patient Transport Services in Wales. Operation Use and Performance Standards*." This stated that determination of medical need would depend upon:  
  
*"The medical condition of the individual patient, the availability of private or public transport and distance to be travelled. The principle which should apply is that each patient should be able to reach and return from hospital or treatment centre in a reasonable time and in reasonable comfort, without detriment to their medical condition."*
- 2.3 There was concern that the definition was non-specific and as a consequence was being interpreted differently by different medical practitioners and their representatives resulting in a service that was not provided equitably across Wales.
- 2.4 A sub group was set up to consider the criteria with representation from NHS trusts, the Welsh Ambulance Trust, LHBs, Medical Directors, Nursing, the BMA and CHCs. The group met on 17<sup>th</sup> March 2006 to consider the revised medical need criteria adopted in North Wales and Powys and to work from these to agree a protocol for use across Wales.

## Transport Booking Arrangements

2.5 The current arrangements for booking non-emergency patient transport are as follows:

- First journey is arranged by the GP/dentist/midwife (or transport contact centre for patients in Powys and North Wales). Where GPs have notified LHBs that they will no longer provide this service, responsibility for the provision of patient transport lies with the LHB of the resident.
- Arrangements for subsequent journeys are the responsibility of the receiving hospital. Decisions on the eligibility of patients and the provision of transport should therefore be made by the consultant/trust staff at the receiving hospital.

2.6 The review group considers the contact centres currently in use in Powys and North Wales to be best practice for the management of non-emergency patient transport as they provide a single point of contact for the patient and are able to consistently apply the medical need criteria. The group has therefore recommended that, in Wales, there should be four regional contact centres following similar boundaries to the transport consortia. New contact centres will need to be established for South East Wales and South West Wales, with Ceredigion joining the Powys contact centre.

2.7 Julia Pellow, Patient Transport Co-ordinator at Powys Local Health Board, has been appointed as Project Manager for the Review of Non-Emergency Patient Transport in Wales and her new role includes the production of a guide to good practice for the setting up of the new Contact Centres, which will be available shortly.

2.8 The existing contact centres also provide advice on alternative travel options to patients who are not eligible for free patient transport. These options may include voluntary sector transport and it is recommended that Local Health Boards, when setting up contact centres, work with the voluntary sector to ensure they have the capacity to meet any increased demand before advising patients of the availability of their services.

## **3. ACTION TO BE TAKEN**

3.1 NHS Trusts and LHBs must now apply the revised medical need criteria when arranging non-emergency patient transport. This revised criteria supersedes the previous 1992 guidance cited in paragraph 2.2.

3.2 NHS Trusts and LHBs must advise patients, GPs and NHS staff of the revised criteria. It is recommended that patient advice leaflets are produced and that they include a 'Frequently Asked Questions' section to address likely queries.

3.3 LHBs should identify a lead for each new contact centre to liaise with the Chair of the review group, Roger Perks, on the establishment of the new centres.

3.4 The Department of Health & Social Services will make available a small amount of one-off funding to LHB leads to support the setting up of the new contact centres.

## **4. DATE OF NEXT REVIEW**

4.1 The criteria will be reviewed in 12 months.

4.2 When assessing the eligibility of patients with mental health conditions, Trusts and LHBs should refer to paragraph 2f of the eligibility criteria. Over the next 12 months consideration will be given

to whether there is a need for more specific eligibility criteria for patients with mental health conditions.

## **5. QUERIES**

5.1 Queries on the content of this circular should be addressed to:

- i). Roger Perks  
Chair  
Non-Emergency Patient Transport Review Group  
Performance & Operations Directorate  
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- ii). Kathryn Evans  
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5.2 Queries on the Review and Transport Contact Centres can be addressed to:

- i). Julia Pellow  
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Yours sincerely

**John Hill-Tout**  
Director of Performance & Operations  
Health and Social Services Department

## **Distribution List**

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## **ALL-WALES PROTOCOL**

### **ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA FOR NON-EMERGENCY PATIENT TRANSPORT**

**The following criteria applies only to patients travelling within Wales.**

A non-emergency patient is defined as a patient who, whilst requiring treatment, does not need the skills of an ambulance paramedic or technician, but may require trained patient care ambulance personnel to undertake a journey to or from a health facility.

#### **Principle**

1. A need for treatment does not automatically imply a need for transport.

The following criteria should be applied to assist in the decision to provide transport.

- a) The medical condition of the patient is such that they require the skills of ambulance staff or appropriately skilled personnel on or for the journey.

And /or

- b) The medical condition of the patient is such that it would be detrimental to the patient's condition or recovery if they were to travel by any other means.

#### **Eligibility for Non-Emergency Patient Transport**

2. A patient will be entitled to hospital transport if they:

- a) Need a stretcher for the journey
- b) Require oxygen or other medical gases during transit
- c) Need to travel in a wheelchair (providing they do not have a specially adapted vehicle or are unable to use the vehicle for that journey).
- d) Are receiving regular dialysis or cancer treatment
- e) Cannot walk without continual support
- f) Cannot use public transport because they:
  - ☐ Have a medical condition that would compromise their dignity or cause public concern
  - ☐ Have severe communication difficulties
  - ☐ Experience side effects as a result of their medical treatment or condition

3. In applying the above criteria, the following issues should be taken into consideration.
- a) A need for the special facilities provided by a purpose-built ambulance and specially trained staff.
  - b) An underlying medical and mobility condition which makes the use of other forms of transport inappropriate.
  - c) The nature of the treatment provided means that the use of alternative transport would be detrimental to the patient's condition or recovery.
  - d) Failure to provide transport for a course of treatment would be detrimental to the patient's health or recovery.
  - e) Patients who require a carer during their visit to the treatment centre should make arrangements to meet them at the treatment centre, unless the presence of the carer is essential for the journey.
  - f) The address of the patient and the availability of alternative transport in their area is to be a consideration as this may impact on 2.c

#### **Eligibility for Carer/Escort**

4. A carer/escort should be considered if:
- a) The patient's condition is such that they require constant attention or support.
  - b) The patient has severe communication difficulties, for example, profound deafness or speech difficulties
  - c) The patient has a mental health condition that makes it unsuitable for them to travel unaccompanied
  - d) It is a first referral and a carer is attending to provide support to the patient
  - e) The patient is receiving renal dialysis or oncology treatment

#### **Note:**

- a) Only in special circumstances should more than one carer (i.e. carer and nurse) be transported.
- b) A carer is essential for all children under 18 years of age.

## **Patients Not Eligible for Non-Emergency Patient Transport**

5. Patients who are not eligible for non-emergency patient transport should be advised of alternative methods of transport so they can make their own arrangements to go to the designated treatment centre/hospital. If having tried all alternatives the patient has no other means of transport available to them then they should be considered.
6. Patients making their own way to hospital should be advised that they may be able to claim back some or all of their travel costs if they receive any of the following:
  - Income support benefit
  - Income based job seekers allowance
  - Working tax credit or child tax credit
  - Or hold a HC2 or HC3