

Study shows new ambulance service standards could lead to a better response for patients

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A new set of performance targets for the ambulance service announced by NHS England today (Thursday 13 July 2017) could allow the ambulance service to use their resources much more efficiently, according to new research from the University of Sheffield.

The study, led by the Centre for Emergency and Urgent Care Research (CURE) at the University of Sheffield, has conducted an independent evaluation of the NHS England Ambulance Response Programme which includes initiatives that allow more time for 999 call handlers to identify the urgency of calls and type of response required.

It has also assessed the effects of changes, which aim to support early identification of the most life-threatening calls and to ensure the right clinical response is made for all 999 calls.

The University of Sheffield research team analysed more than 14 million 999 calls and found that the changes to call handling and dispatch will enable ambulance services to use their resources much more effectively, so that up to 750,000 vehicles will be available to immediately respond to emergency calls each year in England.

During the 18 month trial period, the study found that 6.5 per cent of the most serious calls received a faster response, more patients who needed to go to hospital got the right response first time and 75 per cent of calls

for cardiac arrest were identified early in the call - most of these within one minute. The Sheffield evaluation also found there were no reports of any safety issues for patients.

Results from the study suggest that having more vehicles available reduces the risk of some patients waiting for long periods of time before help arrives.

Janette Turner, Reader in Emergency and Urgent Care Research at the University of Sheffield, who led the independent evaluation, said: "Ambulance services in England receive around 10 million calls a year for a wide range of urgent health problems. For many years [ambulance service](#) performance has been measured using [response](#) time targets but over [time](#) these have led to inefficient practices, such as sending multiple vehicles to the same call in order to stop the clock. It also meant that sometimes the wrong type of [vehicle](#) arrived, for example a car, which resulted in hidden waits for the right vehicle for patients who need to be taken to hospital. Chasing targets for some calls also meant unacceptably long waiting times for others.

"Ambulance services in England are under significant pressure as demand continues to increase. Our study at the University of Sheffield has shown that the new [ambulance service](#) standards announced by NHS England have, overall, allowed the services testing these changes to provide a consistent service for people calling 999 despite these challenges.

"More long term changes in, for example, the mix of vehicles needed to support these initiatives will be required but the early experience indicates this is a step in the right direction and there is scope for continued further improvement."

More information: Ambulance report:

www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_f.../ARPreport_Final.pdf

Provided by University of Sheffield

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