

11-hour ambulance delay as UK healthcare hits crisis

January 31 2023



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Last July, 78-year-old Jacqueline Hulbert suffered a fall at home and was left lying on the floor for 11 hours waiting for an ambulance.

Her son Mathew Hulbert witnessed her "undignified" ordeal and has gone public to highlight the crisis within the overstretched state-funded health service.

Jacqueline, known as Jackie, died from sepsis two days after her admission to hospital.

While there may be no direct link between her death and her long wait for an [ambulance](#), Mathew has spoken out on the family's experiences with the crisis-hit NHS public health provider.

Hulbert spoke to AFP in Barwell, a small town 100 miles (160 kilometres) north of London where he is a local councillor.

The 42-year-old has repeated his story numerous times but he still gets emotional as he remembers his mother's suffering last summer.

Early on July 10, he was woken up at 4:30 am by a call from the [local council](#), saying his mother had fallen overnight and activated the emergency alarm she wore.

A friend drove him over and they called for an ambulance at 05:01 am.

"A paramedic in a car finally arrived at 4:00 pm, 11 hours later, and then she further called for an ambulance which arrived about half an hour after that," he said.

"My mum was then taken to a hospital where it was found that she got an infection that turned to sepsis and she died two days later."

Grim choices

Mathew stayed by his mother's side during the wait, when she could not

be moved because she was complaining of pain in her ribs and her son feared making her injuries worse.

He gave her food and drink and kept ringing the emergency number 999, to ask when an ambulance would arrive.

"It was totally undignified," he said. "I just felt very isolated at that time because you want to help your parents. You don't want to see them suffering... And there was very little I could do."

As her life was not seen as at risk, his mother's case was not considered a priority by the overloaded ambulance service.

Charlotte Walker, head of operations for Leicestershire at the East Midlands Ambulance Service, told AFP in a statement that "we are deeply sorry that we were unable to get to the patient sooner".

She said the delay was being investigated but the service was experiencing "a sustained level of life-threatening and serious emergency calls" and worked "to prioritise the sickest and most severely injured patients".

Such stories regularly appear in UK media, testifying to the deep crisis in the NHS, caused by austerity measures and the consequences of the pandemic.

At the end of last year, patients for ambulance calls classified as category 2, which includes heart attacks and strokes, were waiting an average of 90 minutes for help to arrive.

Due to problems arranging further care, many patients are then staying in hospital longer than necessary, taking up beds needed for new arrivals.

In England, almost one ambulance in five waits more than half an hour at the hospital door to drop off the patient.

That was the case with Jackie, according to the regional ambulance service, whose vehicles were stuck at the Leicester Royal Infirmary, nearly 20 miles (30 kilometres) away.

'Not acceptable

"Since what happened to Mum, I'm now seeing it every day on social media," Mathew said.

"As we are sat here now, people will be in desperate situations, waiting for an ambulance and having to wait countless hours... and it's just not acceptable."

Nurses and ambulance staff have held several walkouts to protest against these conditions and demand better pay, with a joint strike called on February 6.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has presented a new plan to ease the pressure, announcing that the NHS will get 800 new ambulances and 5,000 new hospital beds.

Mathew, who said he does not want to think about whether his mother might still be alive if she had been treated sooner, has urged politicians to tackle the problem head-on.

"We need cross-party talks to sort the issue out," he said.

"These are people's real lives. People are really suffering, families being destroyed, by what is happening."

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Citation: 11-hour ambulance delay as UK healthcare hits crisis (2023, January 31) retrieved 14 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-01-hour-ambulance-delay-uk-healthcare.html>

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