1. Encouraging Feedback and Complaints

Since the Service launched its five year strategy: “Working Together for Better Patient Care” in 2010, it has seen significant improvements across a range of quality indicators, specifically in response times for those patients with immediately life threatening conditions.

This year, the Service started to engage with patients, the public and key stakeholders to refresh this strategy, making sure it continued to align to the Scottish Government’s 2020 Vision to keep more people at home, or in a homely setting. Patient feedback has become more important than it ever was, in helping to ensure that service development is truly delivering person-centred care.

The Scottish Ambulance Service has continued to encourage feedback from patients and carers, and to make providing feedback as accessible as possible. Feedback was received via a range of channels, including social media. In 2012/13 the Service was delighted to secure funding from the Scottish Government to help promote the importance of feedback from seldom heard groups. This promotional activity will be consolidated and evaluated during 2013/2014.

In line with the ongoing activity to encourage feedback on care experiences, the total number of complaints and concerns received by the Service increased by 3% on the previous year: from 839 (412 complaints and 427 concerns) to 866 (471 complaints and 395 concerns). In line with SPSO guidance on complaints handling, the Service will aim to resolve more issues early, at the frontline, ensuring apologies are given freely and action taken where things go wrong. The Service, therefore, anticipates that the balance of feedback through complaints and concerns will move more towards concerns, in future.

Scottish Public Services Ombudsman

In 2013/2014, the SPSO published one Investigation Report and five Decision Reports about the Scottish Ambulance Service. This compares to one Investigation Report and eight Decision Reports in the previous year.

2. Working Across the Service for Improvement

Review of Complaints and Concerns

The Person-centred Health and Care Lead has produced a report, which reviewed complaints and concerns with a view to ensuring the current basket of complaints themes which have been used for complaints reporting was still fit for purpose. The report also made a number of recommendations which will enhance the management of complaints and further support learning from the patient experience. For example, the findings highlight that over half of complaints about clinical care, also include feedback about poor behaviour. In line with the Francis Report, the review of complaints and concerns received by the Scottish Ambulance Service indicate that there may be a link between poor behaviour and poor clinical care. This link will be investigated further.

Feedback and Complaints about Scheduled Care.

The top five concerns and complaints in relation to Patient Transport Service were:

- Delay in returning home: 26%
- Staff attitude and behaviour: 15%
- Delay in travelling to hospital: 10%
- Cancellations: 8%
- Vehicle suitability: 6%
- Missed appointments: 6%
- Eligibility: 6%

Total: 77%

The remaining 23% of complaint and concerns about PTS relate to a range of issues, including: hospital/GP booking arrangements, lack of communication, or the patient’s escort not being booked.
Improvements to journey planning will improve the patient experience for many patients using the Patient Transport Service. The introduction of a new dynamic planning system called Autoplan, which is already in place in some Ambulance services across Europe, is designed to maximise usage of PTS resources to increase responsiveness to patient needs. Testing of the new journey planning tool will start in the summer of 2014, with the tool going live later in the year.

The benefits that Autoplan will bring include:

- Improved patient safety and experience by reducing the time spent in vehicles and waiting at clinics
- More effective and efficient planning across NHS Health Board boundaries
- Reduced planning time
- Reduced number of journeys made without patients
- Increased capacity, allowing Day Controllers to respond to requests and issues on the day, making the Service more responsive to patient needs.

### Feedback and Complaints about Unscheduled Care

The top four themes in relation to complaints and concerns in Unscheduled Care were:

1. Staff attitude and behaviour — 38%
2. Clinical assessment — 24%
3. Accident and emergency resource/Operational cover — 12%
4. Driving standards — 10%
5. Lack of communication — 5%

Total — 89%

The remaining 11% of complaints and concerns were in relation to a wide range of issues, including: questions about the choice of hospital the patient was taken to (3%) and where the patient has been walked to or from an Ambulance (3%).

### A number of programmes are in place to build a person-centred culture, thereby improving staff attitude and behaviour towards patients and their carers. This includes the development of a person-centred session for cohorts of Team Leader and Area Service Manager staff who are undertaking the Service’s Delivering Future Leaders and Managers development programme, as well as the development of a human factors programme which looks at how we can improve team working, communications and behaviour to promote safe, effective, person-centred care.

In the course of 2013/14, the Corporate Affairs team, which managed feedback and complaints and the Communications and Engagement team, which leads on Patient and Public Involvement and Person-centred Health and Care were merged. The new Corporate Affairs and Engagement team have worked closely on developing the bespoke complaints and feedback management system, ViewPoint, and are building one single view of all patient and public feedback, to support service improvement.

The team has continued to support operational colleagues in handling complaints through face to face training, telephone support and an online complaints management toolkit. General Managers for each operational area quality assure each complaint investigation and response. More serious complaints are escalated to the Service’s Significant Adverse Event (SAER) Group for review and appropriate action. For example, the Service identified an emerging trend in complaints in relation to the triage of abdominal pain. The SAER Group reviewed the complaints relating to this theme, which resulted in a change in practice in the Service’s triaging process, mitigating the risk of similar distressing patient experiences.

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### Triage Complaint

*"...I explained that my daughter has a chronic condition... and that the severity of the pain she was experiencing was abnormal and never experienced before. Yet, my request was refused by the operator who deemed my daughter’s condition as not an emergency...”*

Response:

Patient feedback regarding the triage of abdominal pain highlighted this could be improved, driving a change of practice in our Ambulance Control Rooms to help improve patient safety.
3. Accountability and Governance

Patient Feedback and Complaints are reported to the Clinical Governance Committee, Senior Management Team and the Service Board. Feedback themes are also shared with the Service’s Patient Focus Public Involvement (PFPI) Steering Group.

At the end of 2013, members of the Service Board, including the Chair and Director of Health Professions and Nursing Care, attended a Complaints Masterclass hosted by NES, with Jim Martin, Scottish Public Services Ombudsman as a key speaker.

In February 2014, the Service also conducted five divisional PFPI meetings with the public to share the Service’s strategic direction and to cross-reference feedback themes with a range of patient and community groups. The outputs of these meetings were fed into a range of strategy workstreams.

In 2013/2014, the Service hosted three regional staff awards ceremonies to recognise the professionalism and commitment of staff, who consistently go beyond the normal line of duty. Entrants were nominated by their peers for awards that reflect the safe, effective and person-centred values of the NHS.

“I would like to pass on my thanks to the call handler and the rapid response paramedic and ambulance staff who attended my husband in the early hours... The call handler was fantastic... we were told that my husband could have died if we had not got him to hospital so quickly...”

As part of the Corporate Affairs and Engagement Team re-structure, a new Patient Experience Manager role has been created, which means a practising Paramedic will head the team managing complaints. This will forge stronger links with the Service’s Medical Directorate team, promoting early identification of clinical feedback trends. The Patient Experience Manager will also sit on the Clinical Governance Committee and the SAER Group, and will play a key role in promoting person-centred health and care.

“I am a Wife, Mother, Grandmother and anchor of my family and I thank you for not giving up on me. Because of your skill and dedication I am with my family today...”

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