



NHS Pathways – Frequently asked questions

Demand on NHS services is increasing every year and more and more people are calling on the ambulance service. As a result, we need to better manage and direct our patients to the right services to ensure the people with life threatening condition, who need emergency ambulances, receive one. NHS Pathways (NHSPs) will help us achieve this.

What is NHS Pathways?

NHS Pathways is a tool developed by the NHS which is used to identify the best service and how quickly a patient needs to be treated, based on their symptoms.

This may mean answering a few more questions than previously. All questions asked need to be answered as they are used to ensure you are directed to the right service to meet your needs.

Types of service may include, an ambulance response, advice to contact your own GP or the out of hours service, visit the local minor injury unit or walk in centre or home care. .

What is the directory of services (DoS)?

Once the appropriate type of service has been identified, so that you can be directed to a service which is available to treat you, the system is linked to a directory of service. This directory contains details of the services available, their opening times and what they can manage, within your area.

How does the Directory of Services link with NHS Pathways?

The answers you give to the questions the call handler asks, are used by the directory to identify the best service to treat you in your area, to make sure you access the right service, first time.

Why has NHS Pathways been introduced?

We are seeing changes in the type of emergency calls we receive. Many calls relate to minor conditions or exacerbations of long-term conditions such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) or other respiratory conditions. Often these calls can be better managed in the community or by other providers other than A&E departments. NHS Pathways with the Directory of Services can better support us in directing patients to the right service, the first time.

It also provides our paramedics or nurses in the control centres with more information about the patient, if following the initial assessment, their call is passed on to our clinical desk in the control centre to provide homecare advice.

the system gives the nurse or paramedic within the Emergency Dispatch Centres (EDC) speaking to the patient more information about the caller, which improves the advice and support they can provide to the patient. .

When is NHS Pathways being introduced?

NHS Pathways has been introduced to all three control centres in Kent Surrey and Sussex and will be used to manage all 999 calls.

How is NHS Pathways different from the old system?

Unlike the old system, NHS Pathways uses the patient's symptoms to make an assessment, which is then used to identify an appropriate type of service for the patient to meet their need. Appropriate services may include an ambulance, advice to contact own GP or Out of Hours service; go to another primary care service, such as a Minor Injuries Unit or Walk In Centre or even homecare advice. This is in contrast to what was previously used which is designed to support triage up to the point where a vehicle is dispatched in a timely manner.

People with life threatening conditions will still get an ambulance in the same way that they would have previously.

What impact will NHSPS and DoS have on frontline staff?

The new system will not change the way frontline staff respond and treat their patients. However, by directing non-emergency patients to other services, this will ensure these ambulances will be available to respond to life-threatening emergency calls such as loss of consciousness, major trauma and breathing difficulties.

Why do I need to answer lots of questions during the call?

NHS Pathways has been developed using the latest evidence available. The answers to these questions asked are used to identify the most appropriate type of service to meet your need. However these questions will not cause any delay in ambulances reaching emergencies and life-threatening situations.

Are there any national reports that look at the effects of using NHS Pathways and the Directory of Services from a patient's point of view?

At present there are no national reports on patients' perspectives on NHS Pathways and the directory of services. The North East Ambulance Service, one of the first organisations to use the system, has conducted surveys involving patients who called 999 and were directed to primary care. Perhaps surprisingly, patient satisfaction rates of over 90 per cent were returned from those not offered an ambulance dispatch in response to a 999 call. Comments indicated the 'satisfaction' came from the patient receiving the appropriate level of care.

Patients may input via the local services using NHS Pathways, or via the Royal Colleges, who form the National Clinical Governance Group, and they will be expected to have a strong voice as the system is widely used in different settings.

What training do call handlers get to ensure they can use NHS Pathways and the Directory of Services safely and provide an effective and safe service to callers?

All call handlers, regardless of any previous experience, undergo a six-week training programme on the clinical content and telephone use.

Before a call handler is allowed to answer a call, they have undertaken at least 60 hours of classroom tuition, passed assessments to the required level, plus at least four weeks of supervised use and a further review period to assess performance during live use. Routine clinical audit of calls are performed with direct feedback given to the individual to further improve the quality of the service provided.

Where can I find out more about NHS Pathways?

For further information about NHS Pathways, visit www.connectingforhealth.nhs.uk/systemsandservices/pathways

Or contact nhspathways@secamb.nhs.uk