



Ministry of Justice
[Redacted]
[Redacted]
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[Redacted]
[Redacted]

Trust Headquarters
Nexus House
4 Gatwick Road
Crawley
West Sussex
RH10 9BG

2nd May 2025.

Tel: 0300 123 0999
www.secamb.nhs.uk

Subject: Use of 'Code Red / Blue' Terminology in 999 Calls from Prison Services

Dear Sir,

I am writing on behalf of South East Coast Ambulance Service (SECamb) to raise ongoing concerns and seek your support regarding the continued use of "Code Red" and "Code Blue" terminology by the prison services within our region when requesting emergency medical assistance via 999.

As highlighted in PSI 03/2013 and reiterated again in July 2024 following the Health Services Safety Investigations Body (HSSIB) investigation regarding the Healthcare Provision in Prisons, the Ministry of Justice issued clear direction that these internal prison codes should not be used when contacting emergency services. Despite this guidance, recent observations and direct engagement with prisons within our geographical area confirm that this practice is continuing. A recent visit to 2 prisons in our area also highlighted that the Medical Emergency Response Cards referencing these codes are still being issued to staff, and 999 calls are frequently initiated with this terminology. A recent review for the period of 1st January 2023 to 1st May 2025, identifies there have been 17 cases where 'Code Red' has been documented on the case notes, and a further 108 cases where 'Code Blue' has been documented too.

The continued use of this unofficial terminology presents a high risk to patient safety; however, it is recognised that this risk lies outside our organisation and should be addressed at a national level by the Ministry of Justice and relevant prison services. Considering this, the Trust is writing to you and the prisons within our region, to advise that a six-month grace period is to be applied by ourselves, effective from 1st June 2025, after which, we will phase out all recognition and training of the Code Red / Blue terminology. Internally, this was adopted as a workaround to mitigate the risk whilst your organisation implemented the recommendations from the identified above reports. It is evident that this terminology continues to be used, and thus as a Trust, we can no longer adopt these workarounds to mitigate the risk.



At the end of this period, the Trust intends to formally cease acknowledgement of these codes.

We respectfully request your support and action on the following:

1. Reiterate and enforce the withdrawal of Code Red / Blue terminology in all prison services, (particularly those prisons within the SECAMB geographical area) when contacting 999.
2. Provide updated guidance to all prisons, replacing code-based calls with symptom-based clinical handovers. I encourage your colleagues to contact me for support in this action (if necessary). We can support your colleagues in identifying all necessary information required for an effective 999 call.
3. Ensure alignment across local and national documentation, including Medical Emergency Response Cards.
4. Collaborate with ambulance services to support this transition, ensuring clarity and consistency across all communications.

I believe addressing this issue at a national level is critical to ensuring patient safety, reducing unnecessary 999 calls, and supporting both prison and ambulance staff in delivering effective emergency care.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

[Redacted Title]

[Redacted Name]

South East Coast Ambulance Service

[Redacted Address]



Saving Lives,
Serving Our Communities

Chair: Michael Whitehouse CEO: Simon Weldon



1st December 2025

The Governor for

Trust Headquarters
Nexus House
4 Gatwick Road
Crawley
West Sussex
RH10 9BG

Tel: 0300 123 0999
www.secamb.nhs.uk

Dear Governor,

Subject: Reminder – Transition Away from ‘Code Red / Code Blue’ Terminology and Upcoming Deadline

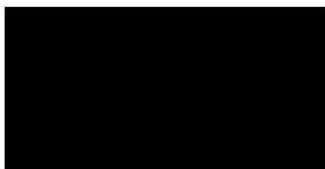
I am writing to remind you of the actions outlined in our previous correspondence, dated 9 May 2025, regarding the discontinuation of ‘Code Red’ and ‘Code Blue’ terminology during 999 emergency calls. As stated, the six-month grace period commenced on 1 June 2025, and we are now approaching the deadline for the shift to full compliance.

From 1 January 2026, all emergency calls to 999 services must be symptom-based and must not rely on your internal code systems. This change aligns with your national guidance (PSI 03/2013 which was published by the Ministry of Justice in September 2021, and the Healthcare Provision in Prisons by HSSIB in July 2024) and is essential to ensure patient safety and an effective triage.

To assist your team, we have enclosed a prompt card designed to support staff when making 999 calls. We hope this resource will be helpful in reinforcing the correct approach and improving communication during your emergency calls to us.

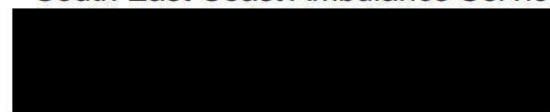
If you have any questions or require further support in implementing these changes, please do not hesitate to contact us. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated as we work together to enhance patient safety and maintain service effectiveness.

Yours sincerely,



[Redacted line]

South East Coast Ambulance Service



Saving Lives,
Serving Our Communities

Chair: Michael Whitehouse CEO: Simon Weldon



9th May 2025

The Governor for

Trust Headquarters
Nexus House
4 Gatwick Road
Crawley
West Sussex
RH10 9BG

Dear Governor,

Tel: 0300 123 0999
www.secamb.nhs.uk

Subject: Use of 'Code Red / Code Blue' Terminology in Emergency Calls

Please find enclosed a copy of a letter sent to the Ministry of Justice on behalf of South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust regarding the continued use of 'Code Red' and 'Code Blue' terminology during 999 emergency calls from prison services within our region.

Despite national guidance advising against the use of these terms, they continue to be used when contacting our emergency services. As a result, we are notifying all prisons within our coverage area of our intention to phase out any internal training or recognition of these codes following a six-month grace period starting on 1st June 2025.

We would welcome your support in ensuring compliance with the national guidance within your establishment. Specifically, we ask that all emergency calls made to 999 services be symptom-based and not rely on internal code systems. Our team is happy to support you and your staff in implementing these changes.

Should you have any questions or wish to discuss this further, please don't hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

[Redacted Title]

[Redacted Name]

South East Coast Ambulance Service

[Redacted Address]



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Chair: Michael Whitehouse CEO: Simon Weldon