

In response to anecdotal evidence of challenges faced by rural patients to access health appointments, ACTion with Communities in Cumbria, working with Cumbria Rural Forum has undertaken an exploration of rural transport for health appointments. Discussions took place with representatives of service commissioners and providers of the Patient Transport Service and alternative rural transport offerings. A questionnaire survey was also undertaken to find out about the real experiences of service users. This Briefing summarises the findings from these activities and outlines the actions that participants now propose to take.

Context

Cumbria has one of the fastest ageing populations in England, this trend being most strongly evident among rural communities.

At the same time public spending cuts mean that rural public transport services are contracting and the delivery of health services, especially specialist services, are becoming more centralised. Anecdotal evidence suggests that rural residents, and especially the more elderly, are experiencing challenges in accessing the services that they need.

In this context ACT, working with the Cumbria Rural Forum, has examined evidence of problems being experienced by older rural residents in attending health appointments.

In order to do this ACT engaged with a range of individuals and organisations representing service commissioners, providers and users.

Service Provision

The Clinical Commissioning Group in Cumbria, in collaboration with other CCGs in the North West, has commissioned patient transport services (PTS) from the North West Ambulance Service. Blackpool CCG coordinates the service on behalf of the 33 CCG partners.

Eligibility criteria for transport appointments which are based on national guidance are used to assess requests for transport that are made by patients. Both the criteria and service process were the subject of consultation with cross representational groups prior to their adoption.

People can access PTS transport for any health appointment, including GPs, Dental, Chiropody, etc if they fulfil the eligibility criteria. These are:

- Where the medical condition of the patient is such that they require the skills or support of PTS staff on/after the journey
- Where it would be detrimental to the patient's condition or recovery if they were to travel by other means
- Where the patient's medical condition impacts on their mobility to such an extent that they would be unable to access healthcare
- Are recognised as a parent or guardian where children are being conveyed

In practice over 90% of applicants are successful in securing PTS transport. Where applicants are unsuccessful, they are referred to a contact in CCG Commissioning Support Services for further advice.

It is here that there is potential for problems to arise because, for rural residents without access to a car especially, there is no consistency in the availability of alternatives to PTS, while the diversity of options means that it is difficult for NWS to maintain current and accurate information about those alternatives.

User Experiences

To better understand the perspective of service users, ACT undertook a limited postal survey, securing 55 responses.

Of these 25 had experienced no difficulty in accessing hospital and GP appointments using a mixture of:

- Their own or relatives' transport (60%)
- PTS transport (32%) or
- The County Voluntary Car Scheme (8%)

However, 31 replies did identify problems. These included:

- Hospital parking (48%)
- Public transport limitations – 26%
- Concern about reliance on friends/relatives for transport – 13%
- Appointments too early to use PTS transport (which operates from 8.00 – 18.00 Monday – Friday) – 6%
- Too many questions to answer to access the PTS service (the eligibility criteria) – 3%
- Transport home after palliative care not covered by the PTS- 3%

In addition to evidence from this admittedly limited survey, anecdotal evidence points to a range of issues that may be faced by patients:

- Greater difficulty in accessing PTS since eligibility criteria were introduced in 2013.
- Appointments that are so early or late that they cannot be accessed using the PTS or public transport services.
- People that may be able to get to hospital but, because of the treatment they receive, are then unable to get home.
- Difficulties in accessing out of county appointments.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Many patients have their transport needs fully met by PTS and find the service provided “very friendly and caring”. However, the PTS does not meet everyone’s needs either because of the timing of appointments or their non-compliance with the eligibility criteria.

For these people straightforward access to alternative transport options is increasingly important. At the present time there are a range of such alternatives but their coverage is patchy and eligibility criteria not necessarily clear.

Given this context, partners are planning to:

- Explore the potential for improved brokerage of alternatives to the PTS, in order to simplify patient access to and use of these alternatives.
- Improve information to NWS Customer

Support staff and users about alternative transport options and eligibility criteria.

- Explore opportunities to increase the capacity of community-based transport options, especially locally-based voluntary car schemes.

Study Partners

The following organisations contributed to the research undertaken by ACT and CRF:

Patient transport users
 Cumbria Community Transport Forum
 Clinical Commissioning Group
 Cumbria County Council
 Northern Fells Project
 Age UK South Lakeland
 British Red Cross
 North West Ambulance Service
 Headway South Cumbria
 Cumbria Rural Health Forum

More information

For more information about Cumbria Rural Forum contact ACT’s Dani Hudson on Tel: 01228 817591 or Email: danihudson@cumbriaaction.org.uk

Annex 1 - Rural Patient Transport Exiting Patient Transport Options.

Patient Transport Service – commissioned by the CCG as part of a regional consortium, the PTS is provided by the North West Ambulance Service. Available from 8.00 – 18.00, Monday – Friday, the service provides free, supported transport to and from health appointments for applicants who meet the eligibility criteria. The timing of the service may not always be a good fit with patient needs and may involve some waiting before or after appointments.

Contact details:

Freephone from landlines, 0880 - 0323240
Cumbria enquiries - 01228 403031 or

www.patienttransport.nwas.nhs.uk/about-pts/make-a-booking/#.Vc3V4FJwY4s

Public Transport – Cumbria is served by a network of scheduled bus services. However, the timing and/or frequency of services may not be a satisfactory match with the timing and location of health appointments. Further, there are many communities where services are infrequent or non-existent.

County Council Voluntary Social Car Schemes – there are 50 schemes operating in Cumbria with the support of the County Council. Volunteer drivers provide a door to door service for users at a cost of 37p per mile (25p after 20 miles). However, coverage is not universal and journeys depend upon the availability of a driver.

Community Minibus – In parts of Cumbria community managed minibuses are available. These operate some scheduled bus services and are also available for hire by community groups. In many cases the services provided are infrequent and operate on a limited number of days per week so may not meet patient requirements.

Rural Wheels – provides door-to-door transport for people who are unable to access scheduled transport. There is a central booking system for planning journeys and a “Smartcard” is used to make payments. Journeys have to be booked in advance and passengers may be asked to be flexible about their travel time, which may not be possible where health appointments are concerned.

Village/Community Wheels – provide a timetabled service for communities to their nearest town, using the Rural Wheels membership and payment scheme. However these services are only available in a limited number of locations on selected days so may not meet patient requirements.

Contact details:

Public Transport: www.cumbria.gov.uk/roads-transport/public-transport-road-safety/transport/publictransport/jplanlink/planajourney.asp

Community Transport: www.cumbria.gov.uk/roads-transport/public-transport-road-safety/transport/commtrans/default.asp

Community Voluntary Car Schemes

– Schemes organised on a more or less formal basis within individual communities, often by volunteers working on a “neighbourly” basis. Because of their localised and informal nature such schemes are not generally available and may be difficult to contact although Village Agents, where they exist, may have information.

Contact details: Parish Councils may have contact information about local schemes. The County Council has information about their schemes. Contact details above

Home from Hospital – As a part of the service which is intended to provide for people during and following discharge from hospital, transport is available to follow-up health and social appointments, free within Cumbria up to 6 weeks after discharge but at a fee outside Cumbria and after 6 weeks. The Neighbourhood Care initiative provides this service and can be contacted on:

Contact details: **0844 967 1885** for Carlisle, Eden, Barrow and South Lakeland.
www.cumbriacvs.org.uk/services/neighbourhood-care-independence/

0844 384 38430844 384 3843 for Allerdale and Copeland

www.ageuk.org.uk/westcumbria/our-services/neighbourhood-care-independence-programme/

Or contact your local Adult Social Care Office

Additional Home from Hospital information - Oaklea Trust

A new project that is joint funded by NHS and Cumbria County Council to support adults

mainly over the age over 65 (also vulnerable adults under 65) following discharge from hospital.

We will offer support such as:

- Home preparation – making sure that their home is warm on arrival from hospital, getting some food for the individual, light cleaning tasks.
- Shopping – ensuring the person has food and drink, accompanying them shopping, doing shopping for them.
- Pension collection – supporting people access the bank / post office to collect their pension.
- Prescription collection
- Companionship
- Advice around accessing community groups and activities.

We mainly want to ensure that the people we support are able to cope with daily living when they leave hospital. It is short term support – up to six weeks. The project also hopes to act as prevention, encouraging people to find alternative aids to recovery other than going back into statutory care.

Oaklea Trust : Rebekah Hayton, NCIP
Coordinator. 01539 735025

The British Red Cross also offer a Home from Hospital Service. contact details below

British Red Cross (NE&Cumbria)

The following transport Support is available –

- Personalised, practical support to assist in leaving the home with confidence and in safety while ensuring the security of property and premises.
- Loan of a wheelchair
- Support to attend health or social appointments with on-going support during the appointment time for anyone with mobility or cognitive difficulties (mild to moderate dementia)

Who is eligible?

- Anyone with a health problem requiring additional support, or low level supervision which may prevent easy access to other forms of transport,
- Wheelchair users will be safely transferred to a regular car seat

If children/young people under 18 years with or without disabilities are included, we can provide booster and baby seats.

Cost:

There are charges, depending on distance – to be discussed with individuals

Booking:

- 10–14 days' notice preferable
- Completion of booking form including risk assessment
- Confirmation of booking by contacting Carlisle 01228 552480;

Email HSCNorthEast_Cumbria@redcross.org.uk
www.redcross.org.uk

Royal Voluntary Service

Royal Voluntary Service provides a volunteer car scheme in South Cumbria that supports older people with door to door journeys for people who are unable to use public transport. The scheme tackles the issue of social isolation for residents who have no other means of travel.

We can help people with visits to friends and families, going to the hairdressers, shopping trips as well as medical appointments. Our eligibility criteria is 50 plus and either disabled/frail/struggle to walk far or use public transport. Cancellation charge £3.00 (if you cancel a previously arranged journey with less than 3 days' notice). All our volunteers are referenced and DBS checked.

<http://www.royalvoluntaryservice.org.uk/service/1494-cumbria>

For more information please contact ACTion with Communities in Cumbria on Tel: 01228 817224 or visit our website: www.cumbriaaction.org.uk

ACT champions community and rural issues

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