

Councillor Vina Mithani
Councillor Rekha Shah
Harrow Council
Civic Centre
Station Road
Harrow
Middlesex
HA1 2XP

26th March 2010

Dear Councillors

Re: Harrow GP Out of Hours Services

Thank you for your letter dated 18th March raising concerns regarding GP Out of Hours services in Harrow.

We are aware of the results and agree that they are unacceptable.

Out of Hours provision in Harrow is commissioned by two contracts. The telephony contract is commissioned directly by NHS Harrow and at the time of this report the service was being provided by NHS Direct.

The Out of Hours clinical contract and visiting service is commissioned directly by GPs in Harrow, their provider is Harmoni.

Whether we commission the services directly or not we maintain oversight and as such have taken steps to address this poor performance.

We have recently put new contracting arrangements in place for telephony services, as last years patient survey results also reflected poor call handling. The problems were tracked back to NHS Direct who could not provide reassurance of their ability to resolve the issues. Having two separate providers was also causing operational challenges. Therefore a new pilot arrangement was made with Harmoni to see if results improved. As these measures have been taken fairly recently, they will not be reflected in the quarter 1 and 2 survey results.

Secondly, we have raised the Out of Hours clinical contract and visiting service with our GPs and whilst they are not picking up direct concerns from patients, the survey results speak for themselves. Harmoni have been asked to comment on these results and have stated that although the results are disappointing, a recent patient survey that they have commissioned locally shows improvement in the visiting and telephone triage this year. Harmoni are also negotiating with local providers to relocate the Primary Care Centre, currently at Northwick

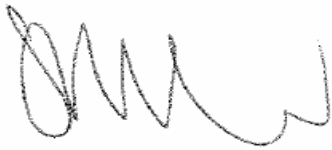
Park Hospital, to an alternative site as there have been patient complaints regarding accommodation.

Harmoni provide a number of Out of Hours services across the country and some areas have reported far better results than Harrow. We will be exploring this further with Harmoni directly.

It is important to note that this data only relates to quarters 1 and 2 of 2009/10, the full year results are not available until the end of June 2010.

Whilst Quarters 1 and 2 were particularly challenging due to the impact of swine flu, we expect better from our providers and will be following performance to ensure it improves.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sarah Crowther', with a stylized, cursive script.

Dr Sarah Crowther
Chief Executive
NHS Harrow