SUBMISSION FROM NHS 24

I refer to correspondence received from you dated 25 May 2012, regarding matters affecting Gypsy/Travellers and your request for information on ways in which NHS 24 is engaging with the Gypsy/Traveller community.

In 2009, NHS 24 received funding from the Scottish Health Council to undertake a review into how access to NHS 24 services for Gypsy/Travellers could be potentially improved. This work reported in 2010 and as a result, NHS 24 has sought to develop stronger links with this patient group, and to improve awareness of and access to NHS 24 services.

The scope of the work undertaken in the development of the report focused on three areas in Scotland: Lothian, Ardrossan and Dumfries and Galloway. Interviews took place with 17 individuals, comprising of 6 men and 11 women.

This built upon an earlier presentation delivered by a Travelling Persons Site Manager to senior staff which informed them about the historical background of the Gypsy/Travelling community and to the challenges currently experienced by them.

NHS 24 consequently has two actions in relation to Gypsy/Travellers in this year’s NHS 24 Patient Focus and Public Involvement Strategy Action Plan:

- Engage with members of the Travellers communities to promote ways in which people can access NHS 24 services and explain the patient journey
- Develop and roll out training to advance the knowledge of staff on issues which can affect Travellers communities.

Work is ongoing to achieve progress across these actions which will include engaging with Occupational Travellers and New Age Travellers, recognising the cultural differences that exist between these groups and Gypsy/Travellers.

In addition to the above, the National Development Officer for the Breathing Space service (for which NHS 24 has responsibility) attended a half day's training session on Gypsy Travelling Awareness and has previously presented to the Travelling Community at Clackmannanshire Council.

The Report into Gypsy/Travellers' awareness, barriers to and use of NHS 24 revealed that some interviewees identified that the expense of calling NHS 24 from a mobile telephone is a barrier. NHS 24 is aware that this extends to other patient groups beyond Gypsy/Travellers. I understand that the Scottish Government is currently considering the potential introduction of a free to call three-digit telephone number to replace the current 0845 NHS 24 number, and is awaiting further research evidence from the '111' pilots in England before making any decision.

John Turner
Chief Executive
NHS 24
12 July 2012