

Arriva Transport Solutions fails key 'tests' on hospital transport

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By Cathy Buss

A company responsible for taking patients to and from hospital appointments has failed three out of five essential set standards.

It follows an unannounced visit by inspectors from the Care Quality Commission (CQC), the Government's health watchdog.

It also emerged health officials in Leicestershire are considering financial penalties against the company, Arriva Transport Solutions, for not meeting performance targets.

They have also promised a meeting so people can have their say on the service.

CQC inspectors spoke to seven patients and 14 staff at Arriva when they visited in April in response to concerns that standards were not being met.

In their newly-published report, inspectors said: "We found patients often arrived late for their appointments. This meant the service did not have effective systems in place to ensure people got to their clinic appointments on time."

They said six out of seven patients who regularly used the service found it unreliable.

Inspectors found some patients were having reduced dialysis because they arrived late for their appointment.

They also found that, although there were systems to assess and monitor the quality of service, the company was not doing anything to reduce the risk of delays. Staff were not being sufficiently supported or supervised.

Paul Willetts, director of quality and governance at Arriva, said: "While we are disappointed we were not able to demonstrate we are meeting all the outcomes required, we are absolutely committed to making improvements and have already started to implement actions to address this."

Rotas are being changed and more paid and volunteer staff are being recruited.

Daily visits are being made to renal units to check on journey times for dialysis patients.

East Leicestershire and Rutland clinical commissioning group (CCG), responsible for the contract, is setting up a meeting so people can give their views on the service.

A CCG spokesman said: ""We continue to be concerned that some patients have had poor experiences of the Arriva service and have agreed new measures which we hope will address issues highlighted by these cases."

He said the CCG was reviewing performance for the second year of the contract and considering further penalties.

Health campaigner Zuffar Haq, a member of the Leicester Mercury patients' panel, said: "It is very poor that Arriva has failed three out of five CQC standards.

"The CCG needs to wake up and deal with this problem effectively and efficiently for the sake of patients.

"This has gone on far too long and all we seem to hear is one excuse after another and patients are suffering, some having to wait 10 hours to get home.

"However, I welcome the opportunity for patients and members of the public to put their views to both Arriva and the CCG about the service."

Arriva won a five year contract worth £26 million to provide non-urgent patient transport services in 2012.