



Nottingham and Nottinghamshire
Clinical Commissioning Group

HOSC Update

Nottinghamshire Non-Emergency Patient
Transport Services

February 2021

Background

The NHS Non-Emergency Patient Transport Services (NEPTS) in Nottingham, Nottinghamshire and Bassetlaw is currently operated by ERS Medical Ltd. The Contract started on 1st December 2019 after a competitive procurement process involving a number of bidders.

Despite starting at one of the busiest times of year for the NHS the Contract has been operating successfully. ERS have fully engaged with all the major stakeholders such as the acute hospitals, community health providers and the mental health trust and established an excellent and cooperative working relationship. They also liaise regularly with Commissioners.

Despite the fact that the Contract started off successfully no one could have predicted the impact of the Covid 19 pandemic, not only on NEPTS but also the wider health service. In the first wave NHSE issued a series of guidelines for patient transport operations as it was recognised very early in the pandemic that keeping patient flows in and out of hospital would be extremely challenging. The limited space inside a NEPTS vehicle meant that social distancing was very difficult and new procedures and crew training had to be devised very quickly. To the credit of both the ERS management team and their crews the training was undertaken quickly and the new procedures implemented at pace. PPE supplies were a major problem in the early part of the pandemic but ERS were supported by the acute hospitals who shared their supplies until a more robust solution was in place.

NHSE recognised very early on in the pandemic that companies such as ERS who were key providers in the response must be supported both financially and operationally. To this end all Key Performance Indicators were suspended and any potential performance penalties were put on hold. Hospital discharge requests were deemed the priority over all other journey types and a coordinated approach was implemented by both EMAS and other East Midlands NEPTS Providers who all offered mutual aid as required. The challenges in the hospitals to create extra Covid 19 capacity had an impact on outpatient appointments and the need for NEPTS these types of journey reduced significantly. All high priority conditions such as oncology and renal dialysis continued to be provided and NEPTS supported this delivery as required. The reduced journeys allowed ERS to move to a Covid secure transport arrangement where patients were transported singularly.

On-going challenges

As the pandemic has progressed ERS have become more proficient in managing the situation. All of their crews are fully trained in Covid 19 procedures and every patient is assessed as being Covid 19 positive or negative before their journey commences. Strict PPE and vehicle cleaning processes ensure that both patients and crews are protected. Commissioners have been extremely supportive of ERS and ensured that when additional NEPTS support is required, for example over Christmas and the New Year, this is fully funded. As with other front line healthcare workers ERS crews have been able to access vaccinations and this has had a very positive impact on both crew morale and sickness absence.

As hospitals get back to normal activity levels the backlog of appointments could present large increases in activity for NEPTS. ERS are already planning for this and Commissioners and stakeholders are working closely with them.

Conclusion

The new NEPTS Contract was mobilised successfully and operated well. The Covid 19 pandemic has changed the landscape drastically but ERS, supported by the Commissioners and NHS stakeholders have ensured that patient flows in and out of hospital have been maintained and the majority of patients have attended their planned appointments. More challenges are likely to arise in the coming months but Commissioners will ensure that both patients and ERS are fully supported as required.

A Provider statement is given in Appendix A.



Statement from the Provider ERS Medical Nottingham

Statement of ERS Medical contract

Following the award of the Nottinghamshire NEPTS to ERS medical, the transition of the contract on 1st December 2019 went extremely well. Support from the CCG was put in place in terms of a presence both at acute sites and ERS Medical however this was quickly reviewed due to the success of the transition.

Relationships between ERS Medical and its stakeholders were built upon using the experience held within the existing employee framework and the introduction of closer partnership working with the Senior Operational Manager. These relationships, and the need for close working relationships with other system partners, were very quickly cemented by the unexpected introduction of the Covid 10 pandemic.

ERS Medical adapted to the new priorities of a very pressurised system and all the new ways of working that this brought with it, in terms of social distancing on vehicles and the requirement of extra IPC and PPE regulations. Whilst this change was necessary, the main core values of providing a reliable, caring service that puts people at the heart of everything we do remained the central point of focus.

Whilst national guidance suggested that Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) should be put on hold throughout the first wave of the pandemic in order to focus more on discharge turnaround, ERS Medical continued to balance the needs of the acute hospitals along with the needs of all patients travelling especially those attending regular life changing treatment.

It is difficult to give a full and true picture of the first year of the contract in terms of the “normal” working status for NEPTS, however, it is clear from engagement with our system partners, CCG colleagues and internal colleagues that the response to the pandemic from ERS Medical has been a very positive and successful one.

It is also clear from the KPI data that we have continued to monitor over the year that whilst challenges have been faced in terms of reduced capacity, quality has remained at a consistent level with improvements being seen in certain areas especially around discharge.

The CCG have been very supportive in relation to the need of additional resource and have helped ERS Medical in firming up the capacity needed to keep patient flow to an optimum level.

Overall, the first year of this contract, and the challenges that came with it, have created a very positive outlook throughout in terms of moving forwards and building upon the achievements and lessons learnt over the last 14 months.

NEPT Provider: ERS Medical