



NORTHERN IRELAND AMBULANCE SERVICE

ANNUAL COMPLAINTS REPORT

2020/21



Northern Ireland Ambulance Service
Health and Social Care Trust



Complaints & Compliments

Annual Report 2020-2021

Foreword



The Northern Ireland Ambulance Service HSC Trust (NIAS) recognises the importance of feedback received from our patients, patient's relatives, carers, advocates and other service

users as a driver for learning and service improvements.

NIAS aims to promote a culture where all concerns and complaints are received positively, investigated promptly and thoroughly, responded to sympathetically and that actions are taken to prevent recurrence when services provided have fallen below acceptable standards. Such learning is key to achieving excellence in pre-hospital care and improving the experience of those who use our services.

In addition to welcoming and valuing complaints and the resultant learning, NIAS also values each compliment received and places strong emphasis on learning from the positive feedback received to further enhance our performance, the patient experience and the quality of services we provide.

Like our colleagues across Health and Social Care in Northern Ireland, during 2020/2021 NIAS faced unprecedented challenges in the form of the Covid-19 Coronavirus pandemic and the system wide pressures this created.

Therefore, as our complaints are investigated by the same senior frontline staff who are managing these system wide pressures, our ability to respond to our complaints within the 20 day timeframe set by the Department of Health was significantly impacted. Only 20% of complaints were completed within this timeframe.

However, despite the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic, extreme resource pressures and increasing expectations of the general public, during 2020/2021 NIAS retained low complaint rates at only 0.05% of all emergency and non-emergency ambulance attendances.

Lynne Charlton
Director of Quality, Safety and Improvement

Facts & Figures

2020/2021:

226,271 emergency calls received

174,510 emergency responses

131,838 non-emergency journeys

152 complaints

87% acknowledged within 2 working days

20% responded to within 20 working days

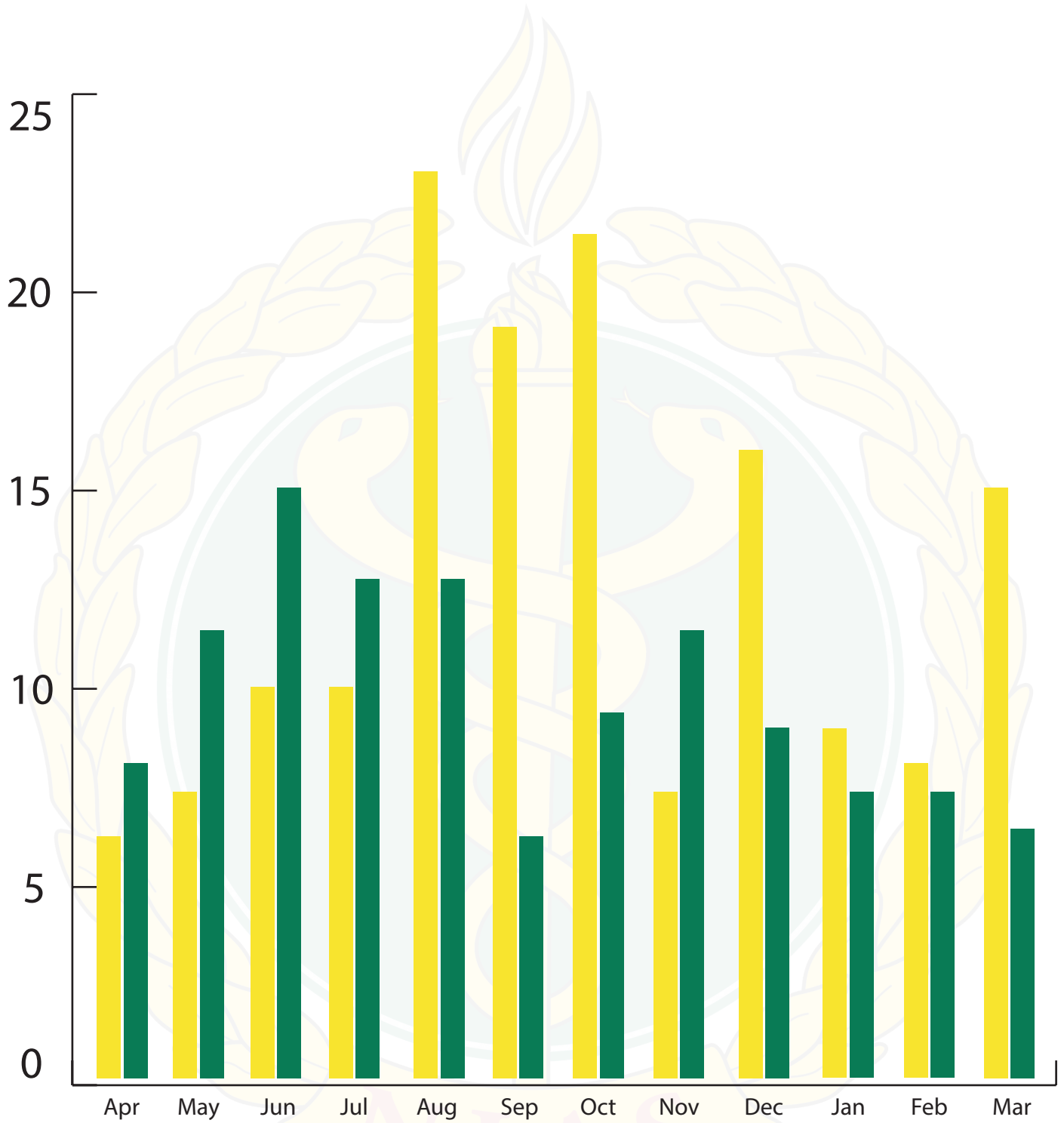
3 top issues of complaint were Transport (Late or Non-Arrival/ Journey Time), Staff Attitude/ Behaviour & Quality of Treatment & Care

216 compliments were received



Complaints This Year

During the past year (2020/2021), the Trust received 152 complaints, which is an increase of 33% on the previous year's total of 114.



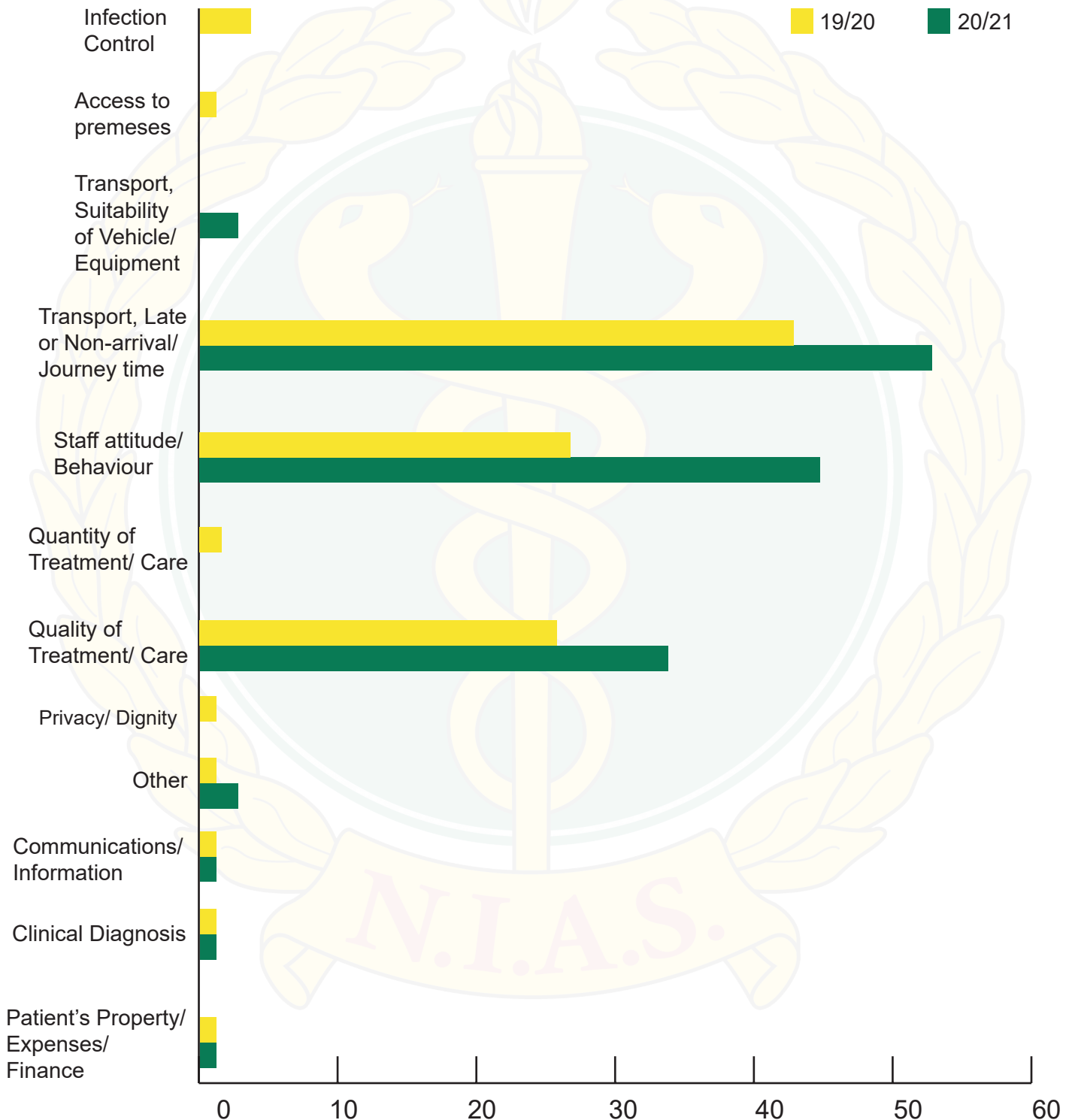
As shown in the graph, there is a contrast in 20/21 from 19/20 for the months August, September & October. Investigative data shows an increase of 14% in transport delays which could be attributed to a number of factors related to Covid-19 including infection control protocols, ED turnaround times & staff absence.

What People Complained About

The chart below shows the number of complaints by subject for the past year (2020/2021).

The figures are per issue of complaint, as a complaint can have more than one issue.

The top three subjects of complaint in the past year were: Transport, Delay & Non-Arrival/Journey Time (36%), Staff Attitude/Behaviour (28%) and Quality of Treatment & Care (22%).

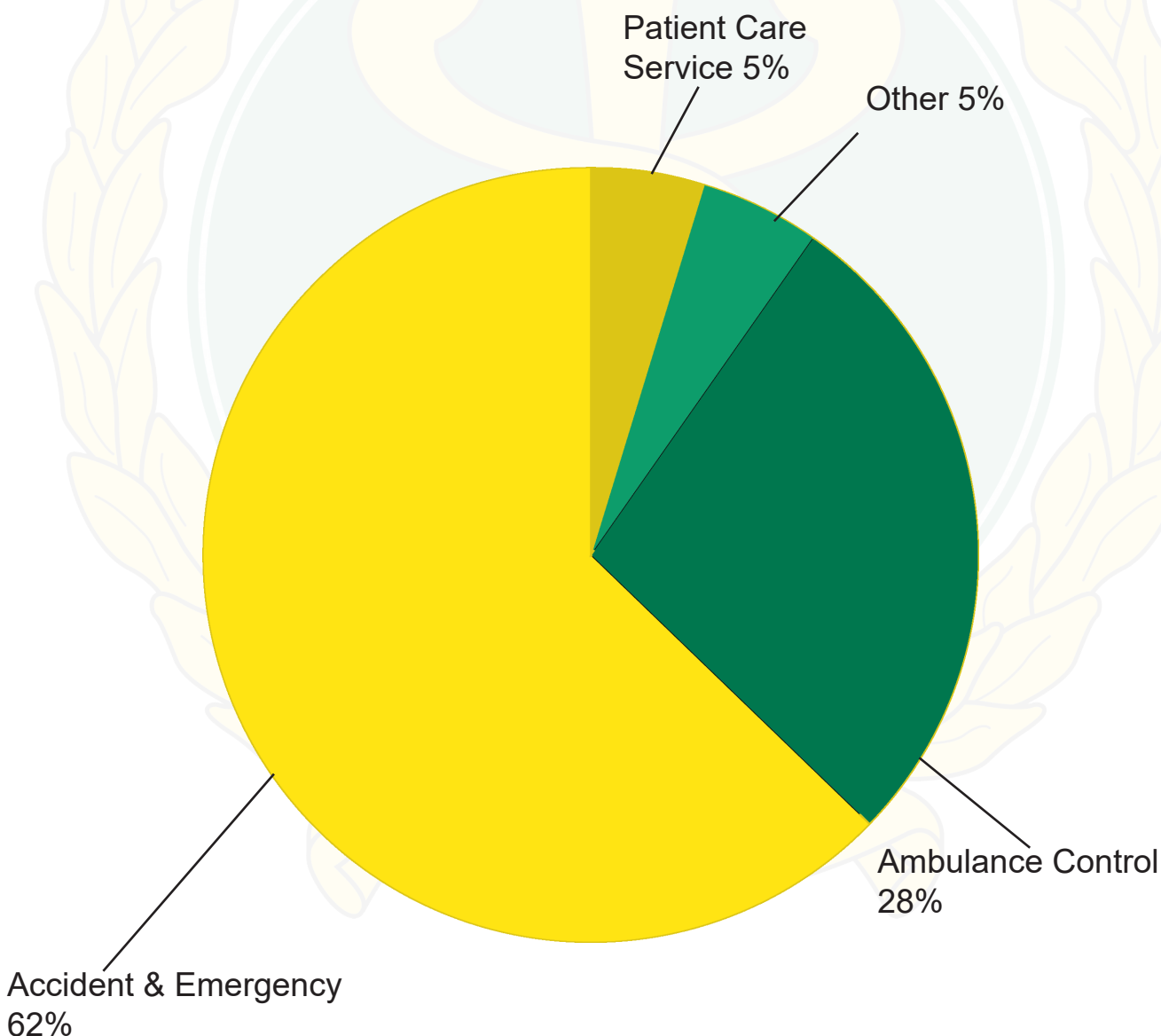


Area of Complaints

This graph shows the breakdown by directorates of formal complaints for 2020/2021.

Of the 152 complaints received by the Trust, 28% (42) related to the Ambulance Control (Emergency & Non-Emergency Ambulance Control). 62% (95) related to the frontline Accident & Emergency Service and 5% (8) related to our Patient Care Service. The remaining 5% accounted for other areas including our Private & Voluntary Ambulance Service partners.

Service Area of Complaints 2020/2021

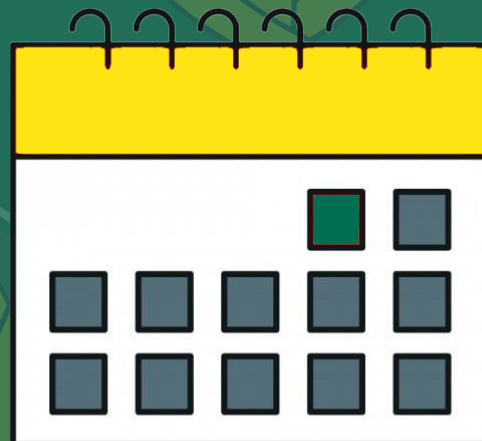


Response Times to Complaints

87% of all complaints were acknowledged within the target of 2 working days. This is an increase of 8% on the 2019/2020 total. 20% of all complaints were responded to within the target of 20 working days. Throughout 20/21 we responded to and closed a large backlog of older complaints, whilst also processing complaints received within the 20/21 period. During 20/21 we responded to and closed a total of 131 complaints, with 45% of these first received in advance of 20/21.

The main reason for the delay in responding to complaints is the competing priorities of the Investigating Officers, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, who are also frontline Managers with the responsibility to ensure service delivery is maintained on a 24/7 basis. The Trust is committed to improving the responsiveness of its complaint handling processes and will seek to improve the response times for complaints in the coming year.

The Trust continues to monitor timescales to ensure complainants are provided with timely responses. However, our emphasis is on the quality of the responses and ensuring resolution for the complainants, relevant to the issues raised. The Trust established a Complaints Improvement Team in February 2021 with the aim of improving our response times within the next financial year and processing the current backlog of complaints.



If People are Dissatisfied

Sometimes people are not always happy with the outcome of the investigation into their complaint. We encourage people to let us know if they are unhappy, and we consider other options to attempt to resolve their concerns. We routinely offer to meet complainants, as this allows the opportunity for more detailed discussions, face-to-face.



Ombudsman

For those people who remained dissatisfied, they had the option to approach the Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman (Ombudsman) directly. In 2020/2021, there were 2 complainants who approached the Ombudsman for investigation of their complaint.

Complaints Training

The Trust delivered comprehensive complaints handling training throughout 2020/2021 to a wide variety of management staff.

We currently employ 1543 staff within the Trust, all of whom are required to undertake mandatory training in Complaints Awareness. To date, 69% of our staff have completed this course (662 staff in 19/20 & 396 staff in 20/21), all achieving a 100% pass rate. This course is an introduction to the issue of handling complaints and basic customer care. It is completed as part of a new staff member's induction process and as refresher training for existing staff on a 3-year rolling basis. The remaining 31% of staff who have not yet completed this training, will be encouraged to do so in the 3rd year of the cycle in 21/22.



Learning from Complaints

We welcome complaints so that we can learn lessons and improve our services. An action plan is completed, where appropriate, for complaints. We use this information to feed back to patients and staff on the changes and improvements made.



Complaints are discussed with the staff concerned and often the issues are brought to staff meetings for discussion as to how services can be improved.

A number of improvements have been put in place over the year 2020/2021 following complaints. Here are some examples:

- A Clinical Newsletter was issued to all staff detailing recent operational and clinical updates. These included:
 - Pre-alert calls for trauma transfers
 - Introduction of the Regional Major Trauma Bypass Protocol
 - A&E Support Falls Response
 - Burns Treatment Update
 - NIAS Clinical Documentation guidelines
 - Memo re Paramedics driving vs attending

- New policy introduced within the EAC regarding the processing of duplicate calls
- All staff who have received staff attitude/behaviour complaints have undertaken reflective practices and where appropriate, received counselling and further training, in order to prevent any re-occurrence.

Compliments

Whilst the Trust recognises that sometimes things go wrong, each year the Trust receives hundreds of letters of appreciation and expressions of thanks to acknowledge the excellent services provided.

We are proud of our staff and ensure that positive feedback is shared and celebrated. Our staff certainly appreciate feedback from their patients and clients, and knowing when things go well. In 2020/2021, the Trust received 216 compliments, which is a 24% increase on the 174 received during 2019/2020. Here are some examples of the wonderful praise we have received.

“My mother had a heart attack and had cardiac arrest on the way to hospital. We’re eager to get in touch with the paramedics who took her in that night for acting as fast as they did for essentially helping to save her life.”

“Thank you to our 2 angels in Ambulance uniforms for saving my wife. We owe you a debt we can never repay.”

“I would like to acknowledge the professionalism & kindness showed by ambulance crew who attended my elderly uncle.”

“Professional & reassuring and a credit to the Ambulance Service.”



“I cannot explain the depth of gratitude I have for these professional, compassionate and skilled people. They treated me efficiently & with extreme care & to the highest level of professionalism. I felt safe & secure in their hands.”



“I am so impressed by the manner in which she took control of a scary situation over the phone and gave us such practical step by step instructions to my husband & myself. We cannot thank her enough for what she did for us that night. We are forever grateful.”

“My father passed away & we really do know that there was nothing more the amazing paramedics could have done for him. They worked on him for as long as they could and treated him with such dignity & respect. They recognised how deeply distressed we all were, they made room for us and encouraged us to come down to the floor & keep talking to daddy throughout so he could know we were all with him. They also stayed with us after he had passed & made my daddy look peaceful. They talked us through what we needed to do & what would happen next. They spoke to us with such gentleness & compassion. We will never forget what they did for us & for daddy.”



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