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# Arriva Still Failing Patients

Many patients in Stockport are being picked up or returned late by the chaotic privatised hospital transport service run by Arriva bus company.

A survey carried out by the official patient watchdog Healthwatch across Greater Manchester received 52 completed questionnaires from Stockport. Among these patients, 65% had been picked up late to go to one or more of their appointments and 71% had been collected late to go back home. Seventy per cent had experienced not arriving on time for their appointment.

Reporting on Healthwatch's findings, Stockport Express said that a third of those who arrived late at hospital missed appointments by more than two hours and two-thirds by more than an hour.

Healthwatch in Stockport also reported complaints that the transport staff were not trained to respond properly to patients becoming ill during the journey and that ambulances were sometimes dirty.

Stockport's Healthwatch distributed the questionnaire itself in the borough at Stepping Hill Hospital and via Arriva, as well as through a range of voluntary organisations. Healthwatch Stockport said the Greater Manchester-wide decision to undertake the survey was timely because it had been hearing of increasing numbers of complaints and comments about Arriva's service.

Arriva won a competitive tender to provide non-emergency patient transport services across Greater Manchester, previously provided by the NHS's North West Ambulance Service. Right from the start of the contract in April 2013 the company was the subject of an increased level of complaints.

In May Manchester Evening News reported that Arriva had missed its performance targets every month since the start of the contract. The targets are themselves appalling with only 90% of all patients expected to arrive between 45 minutes before and 15 minutes after their scheduled appointment; only 80% of patients are expected to be collected no later than 60 minutes after completing their hospital visit.

The transport service is only available to patients who are unable to get to their appointment under their own steam because of their infirmity or impaired mobility. A spokesman for Arriva dismissed Healthwatch's findings as unrepresentative of the many patients using its service.

Among comments from Stockport people quoted in the survey was one saying: "The whole thing stinks and the resources of the NHS and people's health are being stretched because these cowboys have been employed to save a buck or two."