

# Patient Transport

Getting to hospital and clinic appointments can be quite a problem for a person with severe M.E., even with knowledge of patient transport service provision. But it's a start - so we hope that this information sheet on patient transport proves helpful.

The focus is on services in England.

Unfortunately presenting a clear overview is not straightforward given today's operating ethos in the NHS, involving local decision making and a move from direct service provision to commissioning and contracting-out, leading to a multiplicity of changing patient transport providers across the country.

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## Non-Emergency Transport Services

Non-emergency patient transport services [NEPTS] provide free transport to and from hospital and other NHS premises for people who are deemed to have a medical need for the service.

In England it is up to local Clinical Commissioning Groups [CCGs] to decide how these services are managed. Providers are commissioned by the CCG and so vary from area to area: for example the local NHS ambulance trust, or a private company.

### What the NHS says....

Non-emergency patient transport services can and should encompass a wide range of vehicle types and levels of care consistent with the patients' medical needs.

Services may not be available in all areas.

<http://www.nhs.uk/chq/pages/1079.aspx>

You can find information on your local Clinical Commissioning Group by entering your town or postcode here:

<http://www.nhs.uk/Service-Search/Clinical-Commissioning-Group/LocationSearch/1>

The professional who has referred you for the appointment - often your GP - is normally the best person to discuss your transport needs with.

However in some parts of the country it is possible to book the service direct, without going through your GP.

For example, Carol found:

*"I learned you can book a non emergency **Arriva** ambulance yourself if you have an NHS number and appointment etc. I*

*said I needed a stretcher (their word for trolley) so it was sorted.*

*I wish I had known that an ambulance didn't have to be arranged by the doc as it would have saved a lot of hassle."*



### What Arriva say ....

The Arriva website confirms that patients can book their service directly and gives details of the information that will be requested, including to help verify medical need.

For more information see:

<https://www.arrivatransportsolutions.co.uk/>  
or call general enquiries : 0191 520 4000

Access to wait and return stretcher service can be vital in allowing a person with severe M.E. to attend hospital and clinic outpatient appointments.

Member Anna explains:

*"I needed a stretcher ambulance that would wait whilst treatment was carried out and then return me home immediately afterwards.*

*An NHS ambulance would be unable to wait for me for an immediate return journey as they are on tight time-schedules and required to leave patients at clinics/hospitals (perhaps for several hours) in order to transport other patients. This didn't support my health requirements as I am able to sit upright in a manual wheelchair for only short/immediate transfers.*

*I discovered that **St. John's Ambulance** could take me from my home on a stretcher to a dental facility, transfer me to a wheelchair and take me immediately to reclining dental chair; St. John Ambulance would then wait for me and I would be immediately taken home."*

However Anna had found her local CCG and Primary Care Dental Service unaware of their duty of care to

her as a patient requiring this type of service: she had had to discover the St John's Ambulance service option through making her own enquiries. She later obtained written confirmation from the NHS England Regional Director for London regarding duty of care towards stretcher bound patients, and that all stretcher patients in a similar situation, wherever they live in England, should be offered similar facilities to support their needs.

### St John's Ambulance

St John's Ambulance are used as a back up service to the NHS in many parts of England, providing non-emergency patient transport services which alleviate pressure on NHS ambulance services, freeing them to deploy resources to higher priority calls.

St John's can provide high dependency transport, and assist with transporting stretcher patients.

#### **booking enquiries**

Tel: 0303 003 0106

Mon-Fri 9am-5pm charged at standard network rate

Email: ambulance-services@sja.org.uk

Webpage: [www.sja.org.uk/sja/what-we-do/ambulance-operations/patient-transport-service.aspx](http://www.sja.org.uk/sja/what-we-do/ambulance-operations/patient-transport-service.aspx)

**The British Red Cross** provides transport for both medical appointments and for essential daily needs.

They can offer a driver and vehicle providing door-to-door support and an escort who, if necessary, will stay with you throughout your journey.

### British Red Cross Transport

The British Red Cross direct people to their local branch for transport enquiries. If you have online access, you can find details of the service and how to locate your local branch here:

[www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Health-and-social-care/Independent-living/Transport-support](http://www.redcross.org.uk/What-we-do/Health-and-social-care/Independent-living/Transport-support)

#### **national contact details**

Tel (General Enquiries): 0344 871 11 11

Email: [information@redcross.org.uk](mailto:information@redcross.org.uk)

44 Moorfields London EC2Y 9AL

A contribution to costs is normally requested, based on mileage. However the Red Cross advise that no-one will be refused service because they cannot pay.

### **Do you need to travel with a paramedic?**

For some people with M.E. it is essential to travel with a trained paramedic. For example, this type of service may be required if you are prone to seizures, whether travelling to an NHS appointment or a residential respite facility. Again, funding has to be agreed by your local Clinical Commissioning Group.

Beatrice shares her experience - and some tips:

*"I have to travel with trained paramedics as I may require emergency treatment en route. This applies if you have epilepsy etc.*

*Always make sure the ambulance control room know that you need an A&E ambulance with a trained paramedic if this applies to you.*

*We have noted there are fewer such ambulances; hence a much longer wait.*

*Some crews are extremely caring and as gentle as possible in their power to help offering to use blue lights to avoid stationary traffic etc.*

*I have also encountered the Emergency Care Practitioner who travelled with me on several occasions and thought I was wasting his time - he suddenly changed his mind when I became ill and needed treatment."*

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### **Private Ambulance Services**

Some companies operate privately, offering ambulance service to people who have the means to pay. Our experience of these services is limited, however we are aware of several members who have used or made enquiries about this type of service. For example, Beatrice reports:

*"Last time I had in-hospital procedure I decided to look into private transport. I rang a UK wide company which was likely to be expensive to use as a marker. I was told, as it was known I might present with a particular health problem requiring paramedic assistance, it would not constitute an emergency, so the paramedic would not treat it."*

We don't know how typical this service attitude is.

Also, it is worth enquiring about the age of the vehicle you would be travelling in. Some private ambulance companies use older ex-NHS ambulances and these can have quite rough suspension, which can be a problem if you are particularly noise sensitive and/or adversely affected by vibration.

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### Support on Arrival

We recently learned of the Outpatient Liaison Welcome Service [OWLS] service at the Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (Swindon area). An OWLS volunteer will meet you on arrival, accompany you to your appointment, wait with you and escort you to your transport home.

Diane had used this service, and has shared a glowing report with us. So here's to the introduction of OWLS in other parts of the country.

Where there is no dedicated service support is more haphazard, however some M.E. patients - such as Carol - have found that on arrival all went smoothly:

*"A friend took me to A&E lying in the back of her roomy car, and went inside and asked for a trolley to come out for me so all went well."*

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### Funding Arrangements

An **NHS 'Individual Funding Request'** Application Form is used by medical - and dental - practitioners when requesting non emergency patient transport services. The form is sent to the local Clinical Commissioning Group, which has responsibility for the service.

When using patient transport services for hospital appointments, the GP funds the journey to the hospital and the hospital funds the return journey.

This also applies to travelling to and from residential respite care, which can make cross border bookings tricky, as Beatrice found:

*"The first time I used an ambulance to access respite, it was cross border. Naturally the respite home did not want to pay the bill, but the ambulance service in my county wouldn't accept the booking (interestingly, they said they would if we paid)."*

*Thankfully I had the telephone number of the Clinical Director of the ambulance service in my county as I had spoken with him about another matter. His colleague arranged for me to be collected by the ambulance service in my county and it was put on my notes that the booking must be accepted so thankfully the situation never arose again."*

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### Help with NHS Travel Costs

There is no charge to the patient for NHS patient transport services. However, in the event that you aren't considered eligible for patient transport, you may be able to claim a refund for the cost of transport through the Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme.

This scheme applies to people who can't meet the cost of travelling and don't have a friend or relative to take them.

The journey must be for medical or dental care services to which you have been referred to by a GP, dentist or consultant.

The scheme does not cover the cost of travelling to see your GP, or your own dentist, including for primary care services such as check-ups, vaccinations, cervical cancer screening or minor surgery. Travel to urgent primary care services during the out of hours periods are also excluded. For referrals made by a your GP or dentist, the service must be provided in premises other than those occupied by the practitioner who made the referral.

#### Healthcare Travel Costs Scheme

##### ENQUIRY HELPLINES

Low Income Scheme : 0300 330 1343

Dental Services : 0300 330 1348

##### WEBPAGES

[www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcosts/Pages/Travelcosts.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcosts/Pages/Travelcosts.aspx)

[www.healthcosts.wales.nhs.uk](http://www.healthcosts.wales.nhs.uk)

##### POSTAL ADDRESS:

NHS Help With Health Costs, Medical Exemption,  
Bridge House, 152 Pilgrim Street, Newcastle Upon Tyne  
NE1 6SN

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# Travelling Tips

As a stretcher patient with M.E. I have learned how to 'journey well', this is my baseline check list that may be useful if you substitute your own specific requirements. Anna

## Things to consider before the journey:

- Put together a list of information to give to the health professional you are travelling to see - for example:
  - ◆ medication being taken - prescribed or over the counter;
  - ◆ GP's name & contact details;
  - ◆ NHS number;
  - ◆ any other health problems you have as well as severe M.E.
- It is always worth considering being accompanied by an escort - partner, family-member, friend, or Red Cross volunteer.

## It is helpful too if you inform the ambulance-crew of any special needs - for example:

- That although you may look 'fit and well' you are nevertheless extremely fragile.
- That going over uneven or cobbled ground may cause you discomfort and therefore, if possible, for this to be avoided.
- That you are photo-sensitive and may need the ambulance blinds rolled down.

## Things to consider taking with you on journey:

- Manual/electric wheelchair
- Bottle of Water
- Any medication that may be needed e.g. asthma inhaler (bear in mind that you may hit traffic)
- A bed-pan and tissues in a large bag (as a 'just in case' measure - in my experience most ambulances do not carry them on board). Bed-pans can be obtained from a district nurse or physiotherapist via your G.P.

- A folded duvet or blanket to lay on the stretcher-base as most have an extremely hard surface and mattresses are rarely provided.
- Cushions too are not always provided so supply your own if required.
- Remember to take cash/cheque/bank card payment in case needed.
- Dark glasses to wear if looking-up at a fluorescent light when in the ambulance or surgery / clinic chair.

## On arrival at the clinic, be prepared - and perhaps make enquiries before leaving home:

- Whether the clinic is above the ground floor and consider how you should transfer from stretcher to wheelchair and then to chair?
- Not all surgeries are large enough to accommodate a stretcher.
- Not all lifts are large enough to accommodate a stretcher.
- Ask your escort to initially 'scout' the route before you leave the ambulance.

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*Sincere thanks to all 25% ME Group members who have shared information gleaned from experience.*

*Names have been changed to preserve anonymity.*

*Some of this information has previously been published in various issues of 25% ME Group newsletter 'The Quarterly'.*

**The 25% ME Group**

**Tel: 01292 318611**

**e-mail: enquiry@25megroup.org**

**website: 25megroup.org**

**21 Church Street, Troon Ayrshire KA10 6HT**

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