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Geraint Davies , Chief Executive(Interim)
South East Coast Ambulance Service NHS Foundation Trust
The Horseshoe, Bolters Lane, Banstead, Surrey, SM7 2AS

Friday 20th May 2016

CQC Reference Number: RYD6A

Dear Geraint,

Re: CQC inspection of SECAMB NHS Foundation Trust

Following the feedback meeting with yourself, Dr Rory McCrea, Kath Start, Professor Andy Newton, James Kennedy and other team members on Friday 6th May 2016 I thought it would be helpful to give you written feedback of our preliminary findings as highlighted at the inspection and given to you and your colleagues by the inspection chair Sarah Faulkner at the feedback meeting.

This letter does not replace the draft report we will send to you, but simply confirms what we fed-back on and provides you with a basis to start considering what action is needed rather than waiting for the draft inspection report.

An overview of our preliminary findings

The preliminary findings that we fed back to you were:

- We asked the team to thank the staff of the trust for the openness with which they discussed issues with the CQC team
- The caring approach of staff to patients was of a very high standard. We saw numerous examples of staff showing empathy and being highly aware of patient needs.
- Innovation was evident in a number of areas with the inspection team being particularly impressed with the IBIS system, the centre of excellence and the roles delivered by community and critical care paramedics.

In addition we outlined some areas of significant concern.

- Risk management, complaints and incident processes and systems for learning were highly unsatisfactory and did not afford movement of information or intelligence from the frontline staff to the board and back down.
- Arrangements for safeguarding were exceptionally weak with limited understanding of processes throughout the trust. Complaints and incident processes were not linked with safeguarding. We identified that allegations of abuse against staff were not being investigated in an appropriate and timely manner.
- Management roles at all levels lack clarity and as a result accountability is absent in many areas. This is particularly notable for the three clinical based executive directors.
- We found numerous policies to be out of date. In addition human resource policies are applied in an inconsistent manner across the organisation.
- Although we saw excellent care being provided by staff, a high percentage of feedback from staff indicated that they themselves do not feel cared for by the organisation.
- There was a lack of business continuity planning in the event of the loss of the single patient transport call centre at Dorking
- The general approach of the organisation towards equipment management, maintenance and checklists was not seen as robust.
- Our team identified security of access issues at the emergency operations centre at Lewes.
- The C.A.D. did not appear to have been updated to provide the most contemporaneous record of addresses.
- Infection control practice on ambulances, notably hand washing and waste disposal was not of the expected standard.

We advised that these were initial findings and subject to further evidence review but indicated that these areas warranted immediate further investigation and attention from the trust.

Further to the feedback we provided post inspection we would advise that we have received a number of calls from staff following the inspection indicating a continuing culture of bullying and harassment. These calls support some of the evidence from our interviews during inspection and on initial findings appears to be linked with inconsistent application of human resource policies (notably, but not exclusively, sickness and return to work). The number of outstanding grievances within the executive team itself is also a serious concern.

We advised you that due to the serious nature of some of our preliminary findings we would be meeting within the next ten days to explore the possibility of immediate regulatory action. You will be advised by letter of any such outcomes.

A draft inspection report will be sent to you once we have completed our due processes and you will have the opportunity to check the factual accuracy of the report. I am also copying this letter to Victoria Keilthy at NHS Improvement.

Could I take this opportunity to thank you once again for the arrangements that you made to help organise the inspection, and for the cooperation that we experienced from you and your staff.

If you have any further queries at this stage please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Alan Thorne

Head of Hospitals Inspection

c.c. Sir Peter Dixon, Chair

Victoria Keilthy, NHS Improvement