

<https://www.neas.nhs.uk/news/2022/may/26/a-statement-from-neas-chief-executive-helen-ray-following-recent-media-reports.aspx>

# A statement from NEAS Chief Executive Helen Ray following recent media reports

## Helen Ray responds to recent media reports

Recent media reports have claimed staff in North East Ambulance Service (NEAS) doctored or suppressed evidence to coroners to cover up failures.

These stories relate to an historical issue with our systems and processes which delayed the timely disclosure of reports and documents to coroners.

Utmost in our mind are the families who were named in the media, and we unreservedly apologise for the distress we have caused to them.

In early 2019, staff raised concerns about these issues and it became apparent we needed to fully review and revise our reporting mechanisms.

Having listened to concerns from staff, we acted. We commissioned several external and independent investigations and reviews into our processes and systems. These findings showed that the governance and process within NEAS was causing a delay in disclosure, but not that we were withholding evidence, as was claimed in the media.

We fully accepted the findings of these reviews, and a task group was established to ensure full disclosure to coroners of any historical reports and a change to the process in place for dealing with future disclosures. This was led by three of our non-executive directors, supported clinically by our medical director, Dr Mathew Beattie.

The claims made that we continue to fail in respect of disclosure are incorrect. We have reaudited our process, worked with coroners and with the CQC, and have embedded regular reviews to ensure these issues cannot reoccur.

The Care Quality Commission formally responded in late 2020 to confirm they had closed the matter with no further action deemed necessary.

Northumbria Police also investigated following allegations that we had deliberately failed to disclose, conceal or destroy evidence. We worked closely with the police and their investigation was closed with no action taken. The police referred the matter back to the coroners in our region, with whom we have worked with and kept informed of our reviews and actions.

We are confident that the system we now have in place is robust and welcome any further investigation into our service to help provide assurance.

Several cases passed to coroners relate to the timely response of an ambulance to an emergency call. It has been widely reported that the delays in reaching patients has become an issue across the country, not just in the North East.

Although NEAS continues to be one of the fastest responding ambulance services in the country to 999 calls, we are not achieving our target response times to patients.

This is not the service we want for our patients.

We are working closely with our commissioners and other partners in the health system to identify and drive improvements to our performance, but this will take time.

The number one priority of everyone at North East Ambulance Service is the care and treatment of our patients. I hope that by continuing to provide excellent patient care, we can restore the public's faith in our service.