

NHS (Britain): As a paramedic, I can tell you why people are dying in the backs of ambulances, Mr Javid

Tuesday 16 November 2021, by [Anonymous](#) (Date first published: 15 November 2021).

The health secretary promised pressures would not become ‘unsustainable’. But overworked staff can no longer provide a safe service

Dear Sajid Javid, I am a paramedic working on the frontline for an NHS ambulance service in England. I have worked as a paramedic on the frontline throughout the Covid pandemic. It first occurred to me to write to you following your [October speech](#) in which you spoke of “doing what it takes to ensure that the pressure on the NHS does not become unsustainable, and we don’t allow the NHS to become overwhelmed”.

Today, with new revelations of the plight of [people who die in the back of ambulances](#) and the up to 160,000 more a year who come to harm because they are stuck outside hospitals unable to be admitted to A&E, we all see the extent to which the NHS is struggling in the face of extraordinary pressure.

Let me share with you my perspective from the frontline. The [NHS](#) is running on empty. The staff are physically and mentally exhausted. And yet we are constantly asked for more.

I recently worked 54 hours in four days. I had five hours of unplanned overruns at the end of my shifts. My 30-minute break, which I am entitled to in a 12-hour shift, was eight or nine hours into the shift every time. That is nine hours of work without a break. That is due to the sheer amount of calls we are receiving as an ambulance service.

This is not a sustainable way of working. I finished my shifts physically and mentally drained, and considering resigning from my job. I love my job. I love working as a paramedic, but in recent times, I am starting to consider the physical strain that it is putting on my body, and the stress and tension I am carrying around with me even on my days off. My time away from work is not downtime any more, because I cannot relax from the strain of the job. We are being worked into the ground. This will lead to more resignations and more strain on an already stretched service.

The patients that we are seeing are hugely suffering. I see it myself on a daily basis at work: people are waiting 12 hours or more for an ambulance. This may be an elderly person who has fallen and is still on the floor. The repercussions of this for the patient are enormous. They will develop pressure sores that may never heal. They will become severely dehydrated and their kidneys may begin to shut down, which will lead to multi-organ failure.

Another example I have seen several times are patients who ring 999 late at night because they are struggling with suicidal thoughts and need help and support to prevent them from acting on those thoughts. We are not arriving at their house until eight hours later, at 6am, by which time we may be

too late.

I have been driving to a patient who had been waiting 16 hours for an ambulance. Unfortunately, we didn't even get to their house because we got diverted to a more serious call. That patient waited even longer for an ambulance.

Imagine if that had been your mother, one of your brothers or your son who had waited 16 hours for an ambulance. It is unacceptable.

These patients are receiving a dangerous and unsatisfactory level of service from the NHS. This has a harmful effect on the overworked staff, too. It is very disheartening and wearying for the staff to see these situations on a daily basis, despite their hard work.

Please do not tell us that you wish to prevent the pressure on NHS becoming unsustainable. It already is.

Mr Javid, there is no quick and easy solution to this issue, but it should be recognised for what it is. Your blindness and complete aversion to acknowledging that the NHS is already overwhelmed does nothing to help the patients who are waiting 16 hours for an ambulance.

Regards,

An NHS paramedic

Anonymous

P.S.

- The Guardian. Mon 15 Nov 2021 17.10 GMT:
<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2021/nov/15/people-dying-ambulances-javid-health-secretary>

- The writer is an anonymous NHS England paramedic.

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