

Dr Richard T Taylor MB BChir FRCP MP

House of Commons

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Dear Sir

"NHS tries to slash ambulance journeys" (28 February) puts the wrong emphasis on the exciting approval of NHS Pathways as a triage system suitable for use by the NHS.

Ever since the possibly avoidable death of a seven year old child in my constituency whose parents failed after five attempts to get him to the appropriate urgent care facility I have been pushing for the widespread use of a triage system that will not only assess the urgency of a caller's health problem but point out the appropriate pathway for the patient. NHS Pathways fills this requirement exactly. Thus the main point of it is to get the patient to the local appropriate health care service as quickly as possible particularly when they do not have easy access to an A&E department. This will, as added benefits, reduce inappropriate A&E attendances and use of ambulances.

As I have been pushing for this in debates at Westminster for some time Ben Bradshaw MP, Minister of State in the Department of Health e-mailed me when approval was announced. He also has assured me that my other desire, that of a single 3-digit telephone number to access this service, is being explored.

Since then I have met the Chief Executive of NHS Pathways and the Chief Operating Officer of NHS Direct who I hope will work together to produce a unified triage system that could be rolled out across the whole NHS to standardise triage between the many systems that now exist for ambulances, A&E departments, urgent care centres and GP out-of-hours services.

I trust you will accept that this is a real advance for patients in accessing appropriate urgent care when they do not feel that dialling 999 would be correct and that it is not primarily an economy measure.

Yours faithfully

Richard T Taylor

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