

Hundreds of obese patients need special hospital transport

Hundreds of Lothian patients need specialist support to get to hospital appointments because they are so overweight.

AMBULANCE staff have to roll out specialist hospital transport for six obese patients each day in Lothian, prompting concern over the rising cost of obesity for the health service. More than 2,300 overweight patients needed bariatric support from the patient transport service last year to attend hospital appointments, the Evening News can reveal. The number has more than doubled since 2011/12 when only 926 people required specialist help, while sources within the ambulance service say helping obese patients has become a daily occurrence. The figures, obtained through Freedom of Information, sparked fears over the “unsustainable” cost of obesity on the NHS.

Patients call the ambulance service for help to attend appointments and the call handlers judge if they need help based on their weight, mobility and location. If a patient is extremely overweight then paramedics need to bring extra-wide wheelchairs, specialist mats and winches to move them, usually in two vehicles with four paramedics. Lothian Tory MSP Miles Briggs, who helped to obtain the figures, said: “It’s deeply worrying that there has been such a sharp increase in patients requiring this type of support across the Lothians.

“It shows just how severe a problem obesity is becoming across the Lothians and Scotland as a whole.

“The ambulance service does a tremendous job in helping people to and from hospital to make appointments and consultations. But it’s clear their job is becoming more difficult as time goes on, and it reinforces the fact that obesity is now up there with the most challenging public health issues.”

Lothian had the highest numbers of overweight patients requiring support in Scotland, except for Glasgow which had 3,845 patients. It reflects a wider picture as one in four Scottish adults and almost one in five children is obese.

Lorraine Tulloch, programme lead for Obesity Action Scotland, said: “The doubling of demand for transport services for patients with extreme obesity in Scotland in only five years illustrates the increasing burden that obesity is putting on NHS Scotland.

“Obesity is linked to numerous health conditions, such as Type 2 diabetes, cancer and cardiovascular disease, all of which require additional hospital visits, tests and treatments which, in turn, puts more strain on the resources of NHS Scotland. “The cost of obesity to NHS Scotland is unsustainable.”

An ambulance spokesman said: “We currently transfer just under 900,000 patients to and from their healthcare appointments of whom approximately 2 per cent may require additional specialist support due to obesity. “While the number of bariatric patient journeys has steadily increased over the last few years, in the course of 2015/16, we have seen a small decrease in the overall number of bariatric patients conveyed by PTS. “We continue to invest in training and equipment to ensure bariatric patients receive appropriate care and can be moved safely.”

The majority of ambulances are suitable for bariatric patients, the spokesman added.

lizzy.buchan@edinburghnews.com

<http://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/health/hundreds-of-obese-patients-need-special-hospital-transport-1-4262013>

Weds 19th October 2016