

Call from Prof Rick Body, DiTA, Manchester for Point of Care technology for Ambulance Use

The emergency ambulance service is under intense pressure, which is getting worse over time. Patients with serious health conditions often have to wait several hours for an ambulance to arrive. Meanwhile, crowding in hospital Emergency Departments (A&E) is causing long delays for paramedics waiting to hand over patients that they have transported to hospital. Patients often spend many hours on hospital corridors because there is nowhere else to treat them.

The system could be improved if paramedics had better access to diagnostic tests in the ambulance. This could help paramedics to decide if a patient really needs to go to hospital or if they could safely stay at home and receive care in the community. It could also help to spot patients with very serious conditions, who would benefit from being transported directly to a specialist centre.

Portable point of care tests (POCTs) allow tests involving patient samples (for example, blood tests) to be run next to the patient, outside a hospital laboratory. They could be used in ambulances, but first we need research to make sure that they can be safely used to guide patient care.

A platform trial would allow us to test a number of different POCTs in ambulances to check if they are safe, reduce the burden on the NHS and are worth the extra cost. Paramedics would be trained to use several tests for different conditions, and patients would be invited to participate in a clinical trial of their use.

We propose to do some important work to prepare for that platform trial. As part of that work, we hope to identify commercially supplied POCTs that could potentially be used in ambulances. The tests do not need to be run in moving ambulances, but could be run at the scene (e.g., in a patient's home or in a care home). We would therefore like to ask BIVDA members if they currently manufacture any POCTs, for any indication, that could potentially be suitable for use in an ambulance. At the end of this work, we will be ready to use POCTs in ambulances as part of a clinical trial. Please send any product suggestions to Doris-Ann to collate for DiTA.