

London's out-of-hours specialist palliative care provision

A new Pan-London report illustrates variation in the provision of specialist palliative care services across the capital, with areas still falling short of national guidance for their out-of-hours service availability.

A new report, *A review of Specialist Palliative Care provision and access across London: Mapping the capital*¹, provides a complete picture of the provision of specialist palliative care (SPC) services by CCG in London. The report demonstrates that, despite some excellent SPC service provision, there are significant variations in services that are being provided across the capital.

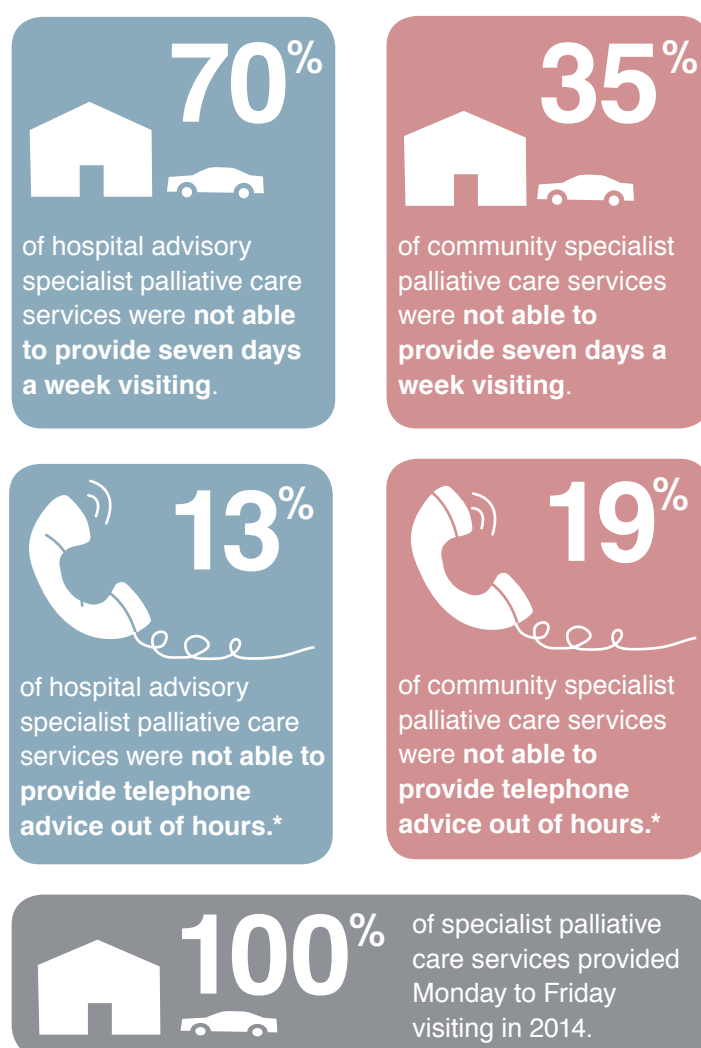
Findings from the report show that the out-of-hours availability of SPC services across London does not fully meet the NICE guidance² mandated in 2004 and accepted best practice^{3,4,5}. As a minimum, this means ensuring that people have 24/7 access to SPC telephone advice and 9am to 5pm, seven days a week access to face-to-face visiting, no matter where they live in London.

The report also includes a series of recommendations for commissioners on how they can improve care and reduce inequity in the quality of care for patients with life-limiting illnesses.

What do we mean by specialist palliative care?

The National Council for Palliative Care defines it as "the active, total care of patients with progressive, advanced disease and their families. Care is provided by a multi-professional team who have undergone recognised specialist palliative care training. The aim of the care is to provide physical, psychological, social and spiritual support"⁶.

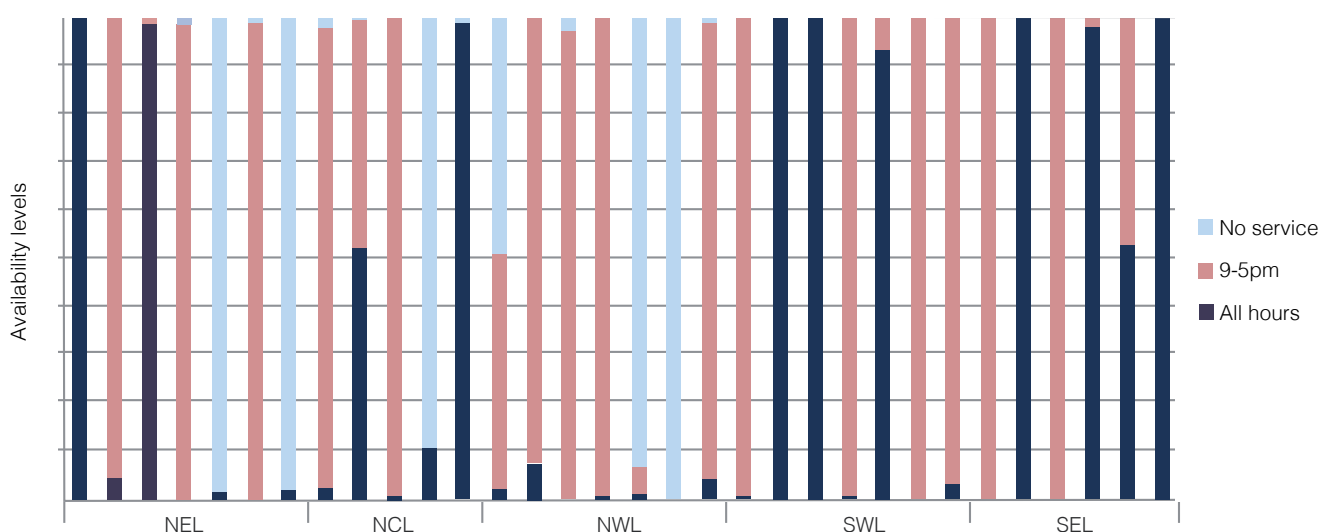
Fig 1: In 2014, numerous specialist palliative care services accessed by London residents offered availability below the minimum service levels set by NICE in 2004.



*Between 2012 and 2014, South and West London saw an improvement, from 94% to 100%, in complying with the NICE Improving Outcomes Guidance of telephone advice at weekends and on bank holidays.

The Pan-London End of Life Alliance is a social movement working to improve the care that people living with a terminal illness and their families receive in the capital.

Fig 2: Availability of community SPC face-to-face visiting services at weekends and on bank holidays by CCG areas (2013/14)



- The chart above shows that, in some CCG areas, the out-of-hours availability of community SPC face-to-face visiting services goes beyond the requirements of national guidance.
- However, in some CCG areas, community SPC services are not available at all at weekends and on bank holidays. In numerous other CCG areas, where more than one community SPC service provider is involved, patients will experience different levels of access to community SPC services depending on where they live in their borough and which provider they are referred to.
- As a result of this variation in SPC service provision across London, people may have limited or, in some areas, no access to community SPC services when they need them out of hours – either face-to-face visiting or telephone advice.

As the data presented here refers to community SPC service availability in 2013/14, it is worth noting that, since then, a number of areas have improved access to these services. For borough-specific information on out-of-hours service availability across London, please refer to page 87 in the report appendices.

Why out-of-hours SPC service provision is so important

- Likely to prevent avoidable hospital and A&E admissions, and consequently help reduce strain on acute care resources.
- Ensures patients with any life-limiting illness and their families have the care and support they need, any time, any day of the week, so they can have the choice of being looked after at home, where most people prefer to be.
- For people living with a life-limiting illness, poor provision of services and support can add to the stress and confusion of an already-difficult time. Conversely, the right care and support at the right time can make all the difference.

All data in figures 1 and 2 have been sourced from the report, *A review of Specialist Palliative Care provision and access across London: Mapping the capital*, published in September 2015 by London Cancer Alliance, PallE8 and Marie Curie. Read the full report at mariecurie.org.uk/london-audit and the appendices at mariecurie.org.uk/london-audit-appendix

Compare UK-wide stats on end of life care at mariecurie.org.uk/atlas

¹ London Cancer Alliance, PallE8 and Marie Curie. *A review of Specialist Palliative Care provision and access across London: Mapping the capital*. 2015.

² National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE).

Improving supportive and palliative care for adults with cancer (CSGSP), 2004.

³ *Care Quality Commission supports new vision for end of life care (online)*, 2015.

⁴ Leadership Alliance for the Care of Dying People. *One Chance to Get it Right*. London: UK Government, 2014: 27, para.46.

⁵ National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). *Quality standard 10: Specialist palliative care (QS13)*, 2011.

⁶ National Council for Palliative Care. *Commissioning guidance for specialist palliative care: Helping to deliver commissioning objectives*, 2012.