



## Officials Say Medical Transport Company Data Doesn't Match Experience

by Christine Stuart | Feb 12, 2018

HARTFORD, CT — The vendor hired to take patients to their medical appointments says it lowered its average hold time to around three minutes, but that doesn't jibe with what state officials are being told by patients and doctors who use the service.

Officials from Veyo, the new non-emergency medical transportation vendor for the state's 800,000 Medicaid patients, told a commission last week that it has improved in delivering services. But just how much it has improved was questioned by patients and doctors who use the service.

In a presentation given to the Medical Assistance Program Oversight Council Friday, Veyo officials said the hold time went from an average of 27 minutes during the first week of January down to nine minutes the last week of January.

The presentation said the average hold time last week was three minutes, but provided no data to back that up.

Karen Buckley, vice president for advocacy at the Connecticut Hospital Association, said things have been improving with call wait times, but they're not as good as they need to be.

The Connecticut Hospital Association has been holding private meetings with providers who have patients that rely on the federally guaranteed service. She said initially when she asked people to raise their hands if they waited on hold for 15-minutes up to 45-minutes to an hour almost everyone's hand in the room stayed up during the first meeting in January. At a meeting last week the number of people who continued to hold their hands up for longer periods of time began to drop.

"It's anecdotal, but there was a marked improvement," Buckley said. She said the company is still struggling with dialysis, chemotherapy, and behavioral health appointments that are recurring. "There's an execution problem in making that transportation happen," Buckley said.

**Bonnie Roswig, an attorney with the Center for Child's Advocacy, said the data presented by Veyo is inconsistent with her experience. She said it's also inconsistent with the experience of others who have been attending these meetings. She said the Department of Social Services needs to evaluate the data it's asking the company to collect and ensure they're collecting data that reflects what's happening.**

The company is fast approaching the 60 day grace period it gets before the Department of Social Services can impose sanctions. Already it was fined \$1,000 for putting a child cancer patient in a vehicle with another passenger. The contract prohibits joint transportation of certain clients with compromised immune systems.

Rep. Cathy Abercrombie, D-Meriden, who chaired the meeting Friday, said she doesn't believe the data Veyo is providing the state actually provides them with the "reality on the ground."

She said it doesn't seem to account for a person who calls and hangs up after 20 minutes and then calls again and is on hold for another 20 minutes. She said the data also doesn't show them the call abandonment rate, which is the phone call from a person who simply gets sick of waiting on hold and hangs up without receiving any service. It also doesn't show how long patients are waiting to get picked up for their doctors' appointments or how many were forced to find another way home.

She said there may be some exaggeration of the amount of time a person is spending on hold, but she doubts they are lying about spending more than an hour on hold. She said for some reason Veyo's system is not capturing some of what's actually happening.

She said they've asked the department to demand certain types of data get collected so they have a better grasp of what is or isn't happening. "If Veyo is not meeting all the requirements of the contract by March 2 that's when they can implement financial penalties," Abercrombie said.

The Department of Social Services has come up with a corrective action plan for the company.

The plan was given to Veyo on Jan. 26 and the company responded to some of the problems outlined on Feb. 6. However, the department has not signed off on those responses.

Veyo claims to have increased training of call center representatives in Connecticut and Arizona, which handles the after-hour calls in Connecticut. It also claims to have increased its staff.

"There has been steady improvement in both average handle time and average speed of answer," Veyo said in its response to the corrective action plan.

The contract says 80 percent of the calls must be answered within three minutes. And the corrective action plan says they must maintain an abandonment rate of less than 5 percent during normal business hours.

As of January 31, Veyo said they have received 397 grievances stemming from 213,075 trips. They said 179 of the 397 have been resolved and 104 were "substantiated as the [transportation] provider was late or failed to transport."

Veyo said they are only using Yellow Cab now as a "back-up" provider for urgent trips because drivers were "demanding cash" from patients on the return trip home from the doctor, according to the corrective action plan.