We audited oxygen use amongst 443 cases brought to the “majors” A&E area of a university hospital by NWAS ambulance teams in May–July 2010. We compared the findings with our 2007 audit conducted before publication of the BTS emergency oxygen guideline in 2008 and JRCALC guidance in 2009 (Hale K. Emerg Med J 2000;27:773).

Results 90% of cases had oximetry recorded by ambulance teams in 2007, rising to 96% in 2010. 19% of cases were hypoxic in 2010 and 90% of cases had oximetry recorded by ambulance teams in line in 2008 and JRCALC guidance in 2009 (Hale K. Emerg Med J 2000;27:773).

Conclusions The proportion of NWAS cases receiving oxygen in pre-hospital care has fallen from 34% in 2007 to 27% in 2010 following publication of BTS and JRCALC guidelines. 86% of cases were treated in broad compliance with JRCALC guidance and 73% were in full compliance. There is potential for further slight reduction in oxygen use in ambulances, especially for COPD patients. This may be enhanced by feedback to ambulance crews and by providing a wider range of oxygen delivery equipment in ambulances.