

Waiting Times - 18 Weeks Introduction

The 18 week 'Referral To Treatment' pathway is about improving patients' experience of the NHS - ensuring all patients receive high quality elective care without any unnecessary delay. The 18 week target applies to pathways that involve consultant-led secondary care services, setting a maximum time of 18 weeks from the point of initial referral up to the start of any treatment necessary for all patients where it is clinically appropriate. The boundaries of this target will be expanding to include more community and non-consultant led services.

The NHS has made vast improvements in waiting times over the past few years and Portsmouth City Primary Care Trust views the reduction in waiting times as an improvement in patient care, which should lead to better quality outcomes for patients.

Current National Targets

1. From December 2008 onwards: the NHS should be delivering 18 week pathways for 90% of patients who require admission to hospital, and for 95% of patients not needing admission.
2. December 2008 onwards: the NHS should be delivering 18 weeks for all patients for whom it is clinically appropriate.

Local Performance

Portsmouth City teaching Primary Care Trust (PCT) achieved the National target in December 2008 and maintained this overall position for admitted and non-admitted pathways during January 2009. The South Central Strategic Health Authority has strived for the 18 week target to be achieved at every specialty as well as overall by local PCT's. This is not a national standard and will prove extremely challenging at every specialty. Currently Trauma and Orthopaedics, ENT and Ophthalmology are just below the 90% target for admitted patients treated within 18 weeks, while Cardiology is just below the 95% target for non-admitted pathways.

Audiology

Portsmouth Hospitals Trust has a large Audiology Department and is the main service provider for Hampshire PCT, West Sussex PCT, Isle of Wight PCT as well as Portsmouth City PCT.

National Targets

1. From March 2008 onwards: the NHS should deliver diagnostic procedures within 6 weeks. (Assessments for hearing Aids therefore are required to take place within 6 weeks.)
2. From December 2008 onwards: the NHS should deliver 18 weeks for all patients for whom it is clinically appropriate. (The assessment for hearing aid and subsequent fitting of the aid should take place within 18 weeks of referral.)

Local Performance

Having previously achieved the diagnostic target of performing all audiology assessments within 6 weeks the Audiology Department had created a significant waiting list of patients whom were subsequently requiring a hearing aid fitting. By December 2008 the national standard required that all patients needed to be treated within 18 weeks from the point of their referral. This included both the assessment and fitting of hearing aids.

This target was achieved by separating the waiting list into 2 workstreams during 2008/09. All new referrals were placed within an 18 week pathway while the existing patients, many of whom had already waited longer than 18 weeks, were scheduled to all be treated by November 2008. This back log alone represented almost 6,000 patients of which 934 were Portsmouth City patients. As one of the largest providers of audiology services in the south of England the number of patients requiring treatment in order to meet the 18 weeks target demanded investment in additional staff as well as a significant number of weekend and evening clinics.

The service met the 18 week standard during November 2008 and has maintained this position since.

Community and Non-consultant led services

Although currently only consultant led services fall within the National waiting time standard, the Primary Care Trust, Portsmouth Hospitals Trust and the South Central Strategic Health Authority aim to bring many community and non-consultant led services in line with this measure. Due to these types of services not having the national focus of the acute services in the past, many have developed sizable waiting lists which have previously not been monitored or scrutinised in the same manor as the consultant led services.

Local Performance

A number of services were identified by the PCT to plan to achieve the 18 week measure between December 2008 and December 2009, and additional resources have been committed to these areas. It is anticipated that all services achieve the 18 week target in the future whether consultant led or non-consultant led. The services currently being targeted are;

Service	On target
Wheelchair service at Portsmouth Hospitals Trust	Red
Neuro Gym (2 weeks)	Green
Primary Care Counselling	Green
Autism??	Red
Paediatric Physiotherapy	Green
Paediatric Occupational Therapy	Green

A number of these services have already achieved there objectives such as the Neuro Gym whose waiting time has reduced from over 15 weeks in March 2008 to 2 weeks in March 2009. Paediatric Physiotherapy has also reduced its waiting time from a maximum of 16 weeks in March 2008 down to 2 weeks in March 2009. 2 week waits for these areas are seen as the optimum level to achieve the greatest clinical outcome and reduce further inpatient admissions.

However, both the Autism and Wheelchair service require a more detailed review of current practices and patient pathways which need to be addressed before measurable improvements can be demonstrated. It is expected that both services will require more service redesign input in order to maintain a long term benefit in terms of sustaining shorter waiting times.