

Address:  
110 George Street  
Edinburgh  
EH2 4LH

Telephone:  
0845 146 1010  
Fax:  
0845 146 1009

Website:  
[www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk)



## Press release

Strictly embargoed until 00:01 hours, Thursday 25 March 2010

### Reduced waiting times for orthopaedic procedures, but scope for further efficiencies

In recent years the NHS in Scotland has significantly reduced the length of time people are waiting to receive orthopaedic procedures such as hip replacements and knee operations. Over 95% of patients are now treated within 26 weeks of referral, compared to only 66% in 2003. But there is scope to make savings by working more efficiently.

An Audit Scotland report published today, *Review of orthopaedic services*, says there is high demand for these services. Orthopaedic care is particularly important for older people, who have the highest rates of fractures and joint replacement.

Last year these services cost over £370 million. Over the past ten years the level of funding increased by 68%, the number of orthopaedic consultants went up by about 50% and activity rose by 12%. As Scotland's population ages, demand for services will keep rising. Reduced funding and shorter waiting times targets will add further pressure. In order to sustain the improvements made, the NHS has to become more efficient.

Today's report looks at areas worth exploring for potential efficiencies. It says moving more inpatient care to day surgery, reducing the length of time patients stay in hospital and making changes to how surgical implants are bought would all result in savings. Based on available information it is not possible to draw clear conclusions about productivity, but the report suggests that if NHS boards with lower levels of activity were to reach the average then an additional 3,700 procedures could be carried out each year.

Deputy Auditor General for Scotland, Caroline Gardner, said: "Back pain, hip problems and other orthopaedic conditions can seriously affect people's mobility and quality of life. Waiting times for hospital treatment have reduced considerably in recent years, and this is a very welcome achievement."

"However there remains much that the Scottish Government and NHS boards can do to help improve the efficiency and effectiveness of orthopaedic services and money could be saved by better use of resources. But for this to happen there needs to be much better information on activity, costs and what works best for patients."

**For further information please contact Anne McCubbin on 0131 625 1653 [amccubbin@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:amccubbin@audit-scotland.gov.uk) or Fiona Deans on 0131 625 1651 [fdeans@audit-scotland.gov.uk](mailto:fdeans@audit-scotland.gov.uk)**

#### Notes to editors

1. Last year there were 76,200 inpatient admissions, 24,300 day cases and 569,400 outpatient appointments for orthopaedics.
2. The report includes a checklist that NHS boards can use to assess their arrangements.
3. This review of orthopaedic services builds on Audit Scotland's recent report on *Improving public sector efficiency* which was published in February.
4. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 can be found on Audit Scotland's website, [www.audit-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.audit-scotland.gov.uk).
- 5 Audit Scotland is a statutory body set up in April 2000, under the Public Finance and Accountability (Scotland) Act, 2000. Audit Scotland has prepared this report for the Auditor General for Scotland.
- 6 The Auditor General is responsible for securing the audit of the Scottish Government and most other public bodies in Scotland, except local authorities. He investigates whether spending bodies achieve the best possible value for money and adhere to the highest standards of financial management. The Auditor General is independent and is not subject to the control of the Scottish Government or the Scottish Parliament.