

A summary for patients

Management of patients on NHS waiting lists

Audit update

What do I need to know?

Prepared by Audit Scotland
December 2013

 AUDITOR GENERAL



About our report

We looked at waiting lists to check if NHS boards across Scotland are running hospital waiting lists properly and treating patients fairly. We published our report on this on 21 February 2013. We have now looked again to check what has changed since our February report.

We found that NHS boards across Scotland have improved the way that they manage waiting lists since our last report.

But the number of patients waiting longer than their target waiting time to see a hospital doctor has increased. We also found that patients waiting for hospital treatment weren't all seen in the time that is set out by law.

What happens next?

Our report makes various recommendations. These are actions we consider the Scottish Government and NHS boards can take to improve how they manage waiting times.

How long will I have to wait?

The government's waiting time target for most patients is 18 weeks or less. This is from when your GP, optician or dentist decides you need to see a hospital doctor, to when you're treated in hospital. You should have your first hospital appointment within 12 weeks. Once you've seen a hospital doctor, had any tests and your treatment is agreed, hospitals must, by law, provide this within 12 weeks. This is usually within the 18-week overall target.

Any periods you are unavailable for treatment **don't** count towards your total waiting time.

Reasons you may be unavailable

If you let the hospital know about particular times you can't receive treatment, for example you're going on holiday, the hospital will mark you as 'patient-advised unavailable' for this time. Your doctor can also decide you are 'medically unavailable', for example if you have another condition, like high blood pressure, that needs to be fixed before you can be treated. If you are waiting for hospital treatment, the hospital should confirm in writing any time which you or your doctor has told them you are unavailable.

Remember...

If in doubt, check with the hospital how long you should expect to wait.

If you're going to be unavailable, for example going on holiday or have work commitments, let the hospital know in advance.

Will I receive fair treatment on a waiting list?

We found that hospitals are looking at more information to check that waiting lists are being properly run, although there is still room for improvement.

We recommend some other types of information that hospitals should look at to help them be confident that waiting lists are managed properly and patients are treated fairly.

We also found that hospitals are providing more information to patients about their waiting time, but a number of hospitals could still improve this. Hospitals are generally good at writing to patients who are unavailable to let them know how this will change their waiting time. However, we found that when patients are added to a waiting list, they don't always get enough information to let them know what to expect.

We recommend that hospitals' letters to patients should include certain information as a minimum. They should provide enough information to help patients understand their rights and responsibilities on a waiting list and how long they should expect to wait.

What about my specific needs?

We previously recommended that hospitals record patients' special needs, for example if you need a translator or have problems hearing. This is so they can provide any help you need to come to hospital. This is still not happening for everyone. Hospitals often rely on GPs telling them about any special needs you might have, and this information isn't collected consistently in many hospitals.

We recommend that hospitals find out if patients have special needs and provide the support they need to come to hospital for an appointment or treatment.

Do I have any say in where I'm seen?

Hospitals should make it clear in advance where they might expect you to go for treatment, for example to a private hospital or a hospital in a different area.

If you ask to go to a particular hospital or see a particular doctor, hospitals can mark you as unavailable for treatment until an appointment is free. This is more common in some areas than others, but overall in Scotland about 40 per cent of people on waiting lists who are unavailable for hospital treatment are waiting for a particular hospital or doctor. This means they might have to wait longer than the target time.

We recommend that hospitals regularly look at how many patients are waiting for appointments in particular hospitals or with specific doctors. This will help them to consider whether they need to increase the number of local appointments available to help reduce how long people wait.

Remember...

If you need to cancel an appointment, you could reduce your waiting time by letting the hospital know as soon as possible.

If the hospital cancels your appointment then you should still be seen within your original target waiting time.

Remember...

Let your GP know if you have any particular needs.

If the hospital contacts you, check they've received details of your needs from your GP.

Remember...

You should be told in advance which hospital you may be asked to attend for an appointment.

If you only want to go to a particular hospital or doctor this might mean waiting longer.

A summary for patients

Management of patients on NHS waiting lists

Audit update

What do I need to know?

If you would like to find out more on this topic, you can [download the full report \(PDF\)](#) or contact our report team at info@audit-scotland.gov.uk

We provide all our reports and key messages documents in PDF and RTF formats, along with a podcast summary at: www.audit-scotland.gov.uk

If you require this publication in an alternative format and/or language, please contact us to discuss your needs: 0845 146 1010 or info@audit-scotland.gov.uk

For the latest news, reports and updates, follow us on Twitter or subscribe to our email delivery service:

 [@AuditScotland](https://twitter.com/AuditScotland)

 [Subscribe to updates](#)



Audit Scotland, 110 George Street, Edinburgh EH2 4LH
T: 0845 146 1010 E: info@audit-scotland.gov.uk
www.audit-scotland.gov.uk