

PUBLIC AUDIT COMMITTEE, EVIDENCE SESSION ON AUDIT SCOTLAND'S REPORT ON MANAGEMENT OF PATIENTS ON NHS WAITING LISTS, 27.02.13

Summary

The Audit Scotland report on management of waiting lists rightly points out that the time patients wait for treatment is very important to them, so the public needs to have confidence in the systems used to record and manage waiting times. Equally, hard-working staff need the right resources to do a good job for the people they care for.

This report shows how inadequate the waiting times management systems have been in supporting timely, equitable and transparent access to our healthcare system.

Patients at the heart of healthcare delivery

The Scottish Government has introduced many targets aimed at improving the speed of patient flow in and out of hospital. These focus on processes such as waiting times and delayed discharges. However, in using these terms it can become easy to forget that behind every statistic on a waiting time breach or bed blocked is a person who needs quality and timely care and a nurse or health care assistant who wants to care for them to the best of their ability.

In the rigorous debate that this report is generating, RCN Scotland would urge the Committee members not to forget the people behind the headline numbers.

The unintended consequences of targets

Audit Scotland says in its report that waiting time targets appear to be placing capacity pressures on the NHS:

'During 2011, the focus within the Scottish Government and NHS boards was on meeting waiting time targets and developing capacity in areas where patients were waiting longer.... Better use of the available information could have helped .. identified wider pressures that were building up in the system around the capacity within NHS boards to meet waiting time targets.'

Clearly the NHS has to live within its means. Whenever the Government chooses to squeeze one part of the system – for example, by speeding up access to treatment – additional pressures

will inevitably build up elsewhere. Every choice, however positive, comes with consequences and the RCN is concerned that too little attention has been given to the additional pressures put on NHS boards to deliver high profile Government waiting times targets.

This Audit Scotland report – alongside headlines over recent weeks about pressures on beds, patients being moved from one ward to another, or having to wait on trolleys for treatment¹ – raise important questions about whether we truly have enough staff, beds and resources to provide high quality, safe and effective care for Scotland's patients within the targets set by Government.

Clarity about the waiting time targets

The 2012 Scottish Inpatient survey found that 88% of patients were satisfied with waiting times. Staff in the NHS work extremely hard and we are all very proud of this. However, there is a difference between patient satisfaction in receiving an appointment and the Scottish Government remaining accountable for fully resourcing and understanding the consequences of the improvement targets it has set.

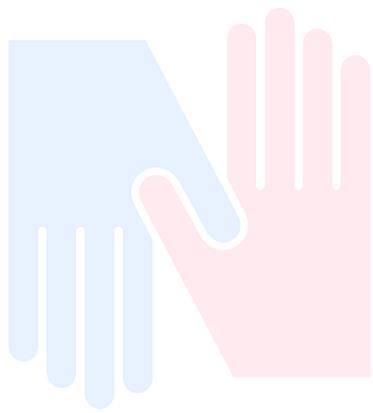
Audit Scotland's report should be a wake-up call to the Government to think again about the patients, staff and resources behind its processes and systems.

If you would like to discuss the briefing in any more detail, please contact Kelsie Pettit, Parliamentary and Media Officer, at kelsie-lee.pettit@rcn.org.uk or call 0131 662 6172.

¹ Such as:

<http://www.scotsman.com/news/health/patients-waiting-for-12-hours-in-scotland-s-a-e-crisis-1-2721027>

<http://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/health/patients-bear-the-brunt-as-nhs-struggle-1559833>



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