

Address:
110 George Street
Edinburgh
EH2 4LH

Telephone:
0845 146 1010

Website:
www.audit-scotland.gov.uk



Press release

Strictly embargoed until 00:01, Thursday 4 March 2010

New way of managing waiting lists is fairer for patients

The NHS in Scotland has made big changes in how it manages waiting lists since 2008 and these have made the system fairer for patients. The NHS has done well to implement these complex new arrangements.

An Audit Scotland report published today, *Managing NHS waiting lists – A review of new arrangements*, looks at how the NHS has applied the new arrangements, known as New Ways, and how this has affected patients. New Ways aims to manage patients more consistently and bring an end to patients being put on what were sometimes referred to as 'hidden waiting lists', where they would lose their guarantee of being treated within a certain period of time.

The report finds that the NHS has broadly achieved these aims, and the changes have resulted in a system that is fairer for patients. But the health service now needs to do more to make the new arrangements work as effectively as possible and to help patients understand New Ways and its implications.

NHS boards vary in how they deal with patients who do not or cannot attend appointments and this may not always be appropriate. The NHS also needs to get a better understanding of patients' needs so that it can give them information about appointments in the most useful way.

The report also finds that the NHS is not accurately recording all relevant information about patient waits which makes it difficult to demonstrate that it is managing all patients correctly in line with the new guidance.

Auditor General for Scotland, Robert Black, said: "Waiting times are very important to patients and the new arrangements have improved the way the NHS manages waiting lists. The NHS now needs to build on this to make sure that the new arrangements work well for everyone.

"Patients have responsibilities to attend for appointments. Under the new guidance patients who fail to attend may be taken off the waiting list and referred back to their GP and it's crucial that the NHS tells patients this. The NHS also needs to give people enough notice of appointments and make sure that they get information about their appointment in a way they can understand so that they are in a good position to be able to attend."

For further information please contact Simon Ebbett on 0131 625 1652 or Anne McCubbin on 0131 625 1653

Notes to editors

1. The report uses the figures most recently available at the time of printing. These showed that about 307,000 people in Scotland were waiting for a new outpatient appointment or for admission to hospital as a day case or inpatient, and 99.9 per cent were waiting less than the 15 week target maximum. ISD Scotland has since published new figures, which are available at <http://www.isdscotland.org/isd/6135.html>
2. This report follows Audit Scotland's 2002 report, [Review of the management of waiting lists in Scotland](#), and 2006 report, [Tackling waiting times in the NHS in Scotland](#). Please note that both links open PDF documents.
3. Maximum waiting time targets in Scotland have reduced considerably in recent years. The current target is 15 weeks for a new outpatient appointment and up to a further 15 weeks for an inpatient or day case appointment. Both targets are to reduce to 12 weeks by 31 March 2010. From December 2011 a new target will be introduced. This will be a combined maximum wait of 18 weeks between a patient being referred and the start of their treatment, including any tests and outpatient appointments.
4. Supplementary reports about a patient survey and focus group work for this report are available on Audit Scotland's website www.audit-scotland.gov.uk

5. New Ways has replaced the previous system under which the NHS would apply an Availability Status Code (ASC) to some patients, including those who could not attend their appointments for medical or social reasons. This would exclude such patients from waiting times guarantees, and the use of ASCs has been referred to as 'hidden waiting lists' in the past.
6. All Audit Scotland reports published since 2000 can be found on Audit Scotland's website www.audit-scotland.gov.uk
7. 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.
8. 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.