



NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

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June 2014 Monthly Report

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Prepared by: NHS England Analytical Services (Operations)

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1 Executive summary

This report presents a monthly summary of diagnostic waiting times and activity across the NHS in England. This monthly report is part of a routine series of publications produced by NHS England.

The data presented in this report measures the current waiting times of patients still waiting for any of 15 key diagnostic tests or procedures at the month end. This data is split by number of weeks waiting, and by test. The waiting times reported are for those patients who have been referred for a test, but whose test had not taken place by the end of the reporting period. Referrals may be from a variety of sources including GPs.

One of the main measurements covered in this report is the number and proportion of patients waiting six weeks or longer for a diagnostic test, from time of referral.

This six week diagnostic wait was initially introduced as a 'milestone' from March 2008 towards achieving the standard Referral to Treatment wait of 18 weeks by December 2008, but diagnostic waiting times now form part of the 2013/14 NHS Constitution. This gives patients the legal right to treatment within 18 weeks of referral (18 week RTT) and as part of this, pledges that patients should not be required to wait 6 weeks or longer for a diagnostic test.

NHS England's planning guidance states that there is a threshold of 99% for this pledge. The financial penalty for non-delivery of the standard is set out in the NHS Standard Contract 2014/15.

The 15 key diagnostic tests included in this report are:

- Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)
- Computerised Tomography (CT)
- Non-obstetric Ultrasound
- Barium Enema
- Dual-Energy X-Ray Absorptiometry (DEXA) Scan
- Audiology Assessments
- Echocardiography
- Electrophysiology
- Neurophysiology – peripheral neurophysiology
- Respiratory Physiology – sleep studies
- Urodynamics – pressures & flows
- Gastroscopy
- Colonoscopy
- Flexible Sigmoidoscopy
- Cystoscopy

For detailed descriptions of each diagnostic test please see the [collection guidance document](#).

Some of the key terms used throughout this report are outlined below:

- **6+ Waits**
A count of the number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer for a diagnostic test at month end from referral.
- **Activity**
A count of the number of diagnostic tests undertaken during the month.
- **Diagnostic Test**
A test or procedure of which the primary function is to identify a patient's disease or condition to allow a medical diagnosis to be made.
- **Waiting List**
A count of the number of patients that are waiting for a diagnostic test at the end of the month.

A more comprehensive glossary is available in the Annex.

All England figures quoted are commissioner based. Commissioner based returns reflect data for patients for whom English commissioners are responsible.

2 June 2014 Key Findings

- The total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests at the end of June was 15,800. This represents 1.9% of the total number of patients waiting for a diagnostic test at the end of the month. Nationally, the operational standard of less than 1% of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was not met.
- The total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has shown an increase of 9,600 from the end of June 2013.
- The percentage of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has increased by 1.1 percentage points from the same period last year. In between these periods the percentage has shown an upward trend, with a high of 2.3% (May 2014) and low of 0.7% (October 2013).
- The test with the highest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer in June 2014 was Urodynamics with 6.9% of all patients waiting 6 weeks or longer. The test with the smallest proportion was Barium Enema with 0.3%.
- An alternative measure of diagnostic waiting times is the average (median) waiting time. The average patient waiting for a diagnostic test had been waiting 2.0 weeks at the end of June 2014.
- There were 809,000 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test at the end of June 2014. This is an increase of 121,000 from June 2013. In the past twelve months the total number of patients waiting for a diagnostic test has been gradually increasing with an average monthly increase of 1.4%, which is higher than the rise seen in total activity.
- A total of 1,580,000 diagnostic tests were undertaken in June 2014. This is an increase of 10.7% from the same period last year. In the previous twelve months activity has increased slightly with an average monthly increase of 0.9%.

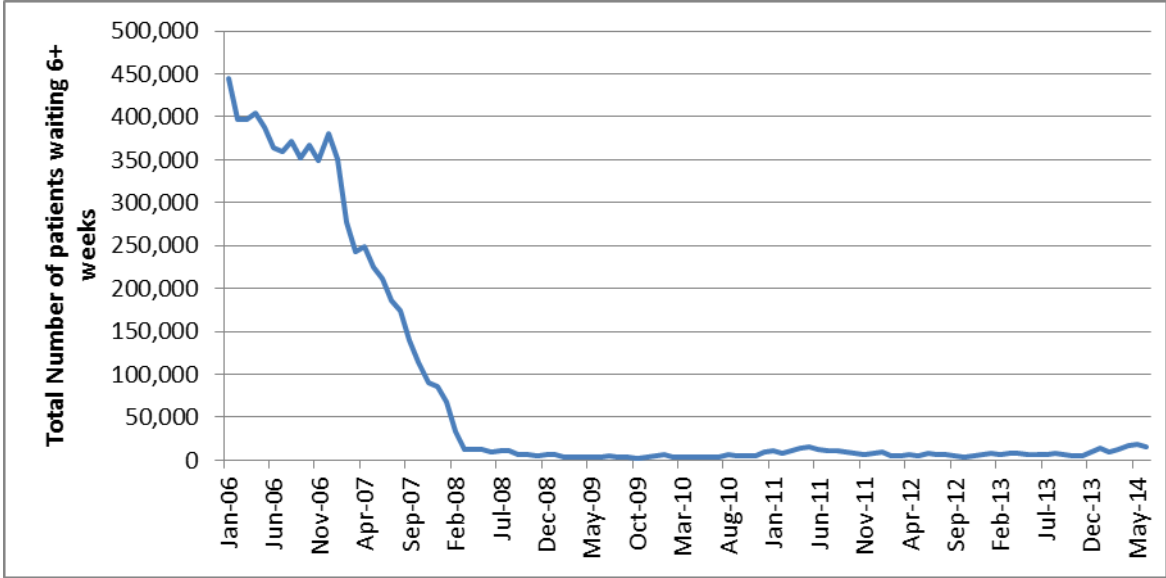
3 National Trends

This section analyses trends in monthly diagnostic waiting times and activity data that has been collected since January 2006.

3.1 6+ Week Waits

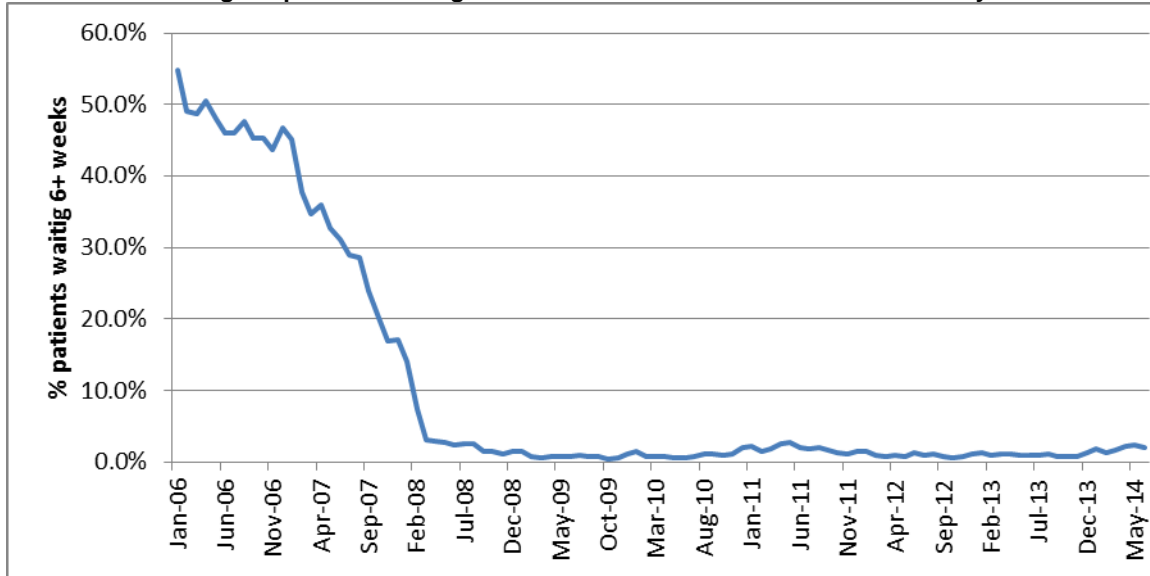
3.1.1. The total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer dropped sharply between January 2007 and March 2008, before maintaining a slight average monthly reduction (Chart 1). This reduction is most likely the result of Trusts working towards the NHS Improvement Plan (June 2004) milestone that no one should wait longer than 6 weeks for a diagnostic test by March 2008. Since that point the total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was showing a steady reduction until to October 2013. Since October the number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has increased significantly.

Chart 1: Total number of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests – January 2006 – June 2014



- 3.1.2. The proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer shows a similar drop between January 2007 and the 6 week milestone in March 2008 before stabilising (Chart 2). However, over the past 12 months it has shown an increase, with a low of 0.7% (October 2013) and a high of 2.3% (May 2014). The 1% operational standard was last met in November 2013.

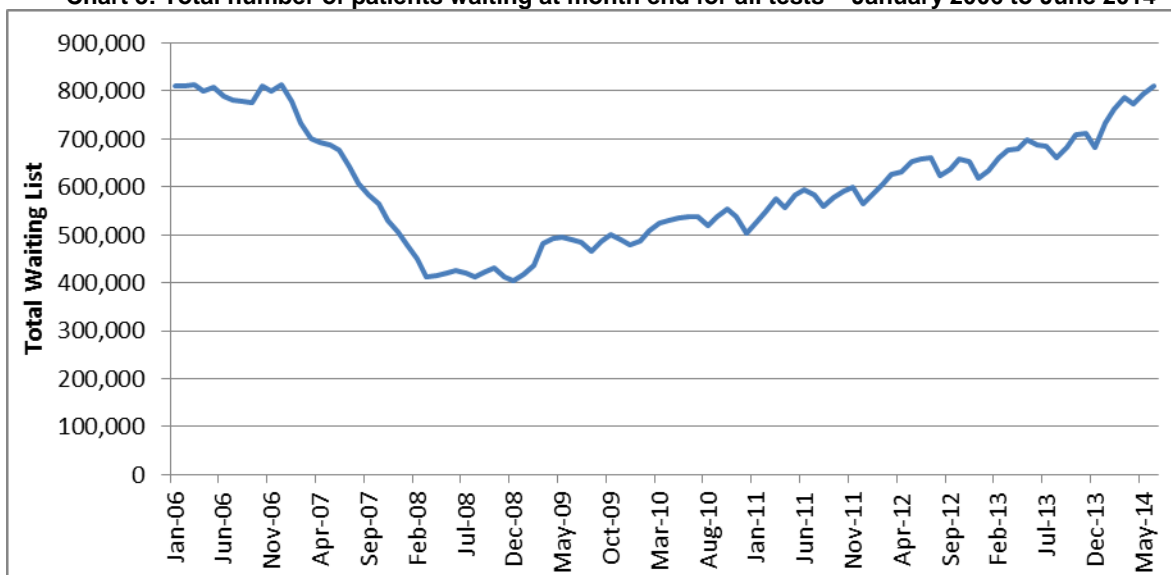
Chart 2: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests – January 2006 to June 2014



3.2 Total Waiting List

- 3.2.1. As seen with the number and proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer, the total number of patients waiting at the month end dropped dramatically between January 2007 and the 6 week milestone in March 2008 (Chart 3). Between March 2008 and January 2009 the total waiting list remained stable, after which the underlying trend has shown an increase. In the last twelve months the average monthly increase was 1.4%.

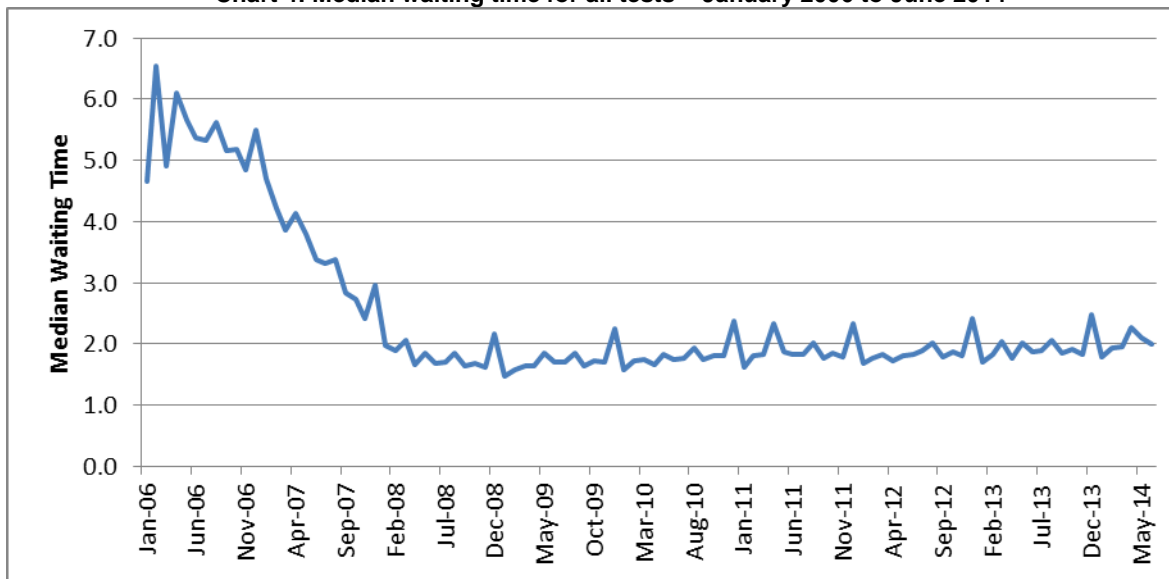
Chart 3: Total number of patients waiting at month end for all tests – January 2006 to June 2014



3.3 Median Waiting Time

3.3.1. The average (median) waiting time displays a similar trend to the total waiting list and 6+ waits. After a rapid decrease in the first two years leading to the 6 week milestone, the median waiting time has remained stable (Chart 4). The data shows significant increases during December every year, as a result of the increased number of bank holidays and resulting staff shortages. However, in the last twelve months, the median waiting time has remained stable at around 2.0 weeks, with a high of 2.5 weeks (December 2013) and a low of 1.8 weeks (January 2014).

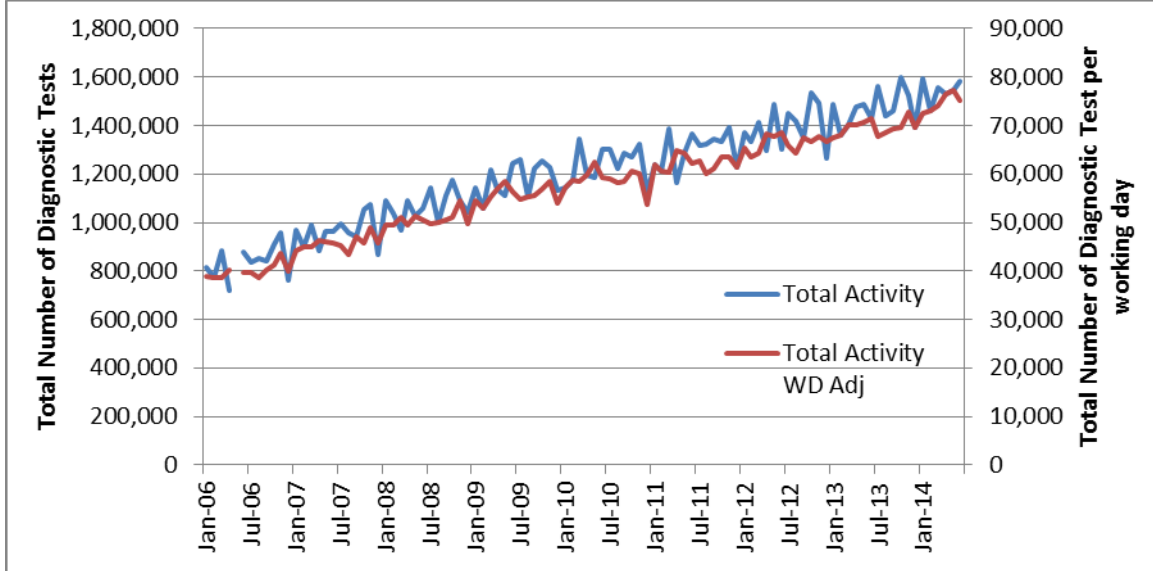
Chart 4: Median waiting time for all tests – January 2006 to June 2014



3.4 Total Activity

- 3.4.1. The monthly activity figure can fluctuate significantly month to month, with particularly notable decreases in December due to the bank holidays. However, the underlying trend has shown an increase since January 2006. If the data is adjusted to show activity per working day, the monthly variation becomes less pronounced. (Chart 5)

Chart 5: Total activity and working day adjusted activity per month for all tests – Jan 2006 to June 2014



Please note that activity data was not collected in May 2006 and as a result all activity time series graphs will show missing values for that month

- 3.4.2. Monthly activity has increased slightly over the last 12 months with an average monthly increase of 0.9% (0.4% when adjusted).
- 3.4.3. In the previous twelve months individual tests are showing small changes in activity with the exception of Sleep Studies, which has shown an average monthly increase of 1.7%.

4 June 2014 Data

This section analyses the June 2014 diagnostic waiting times and activity data including, comparisons between tests, area teams, providers and commissioners.

4.1 6+ Week Waits

- 4.1.1. At the end of June 2014, there were a total of 15,800 patients waiting 6 weeks or longer from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests. This represents 1.9% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month. The number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has shown an increase of 9,600 from the same period last year. The proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has increased by 1.1 percentage points from June 2013.
- 4.1.2. Compared to June 2013, Cystoscopy has shown the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer for a diagnostic test (3.0 percentage points). Audiology Assessments has shown the largest decrease from June 2013 (-1.1 percentage points). (Table 1)

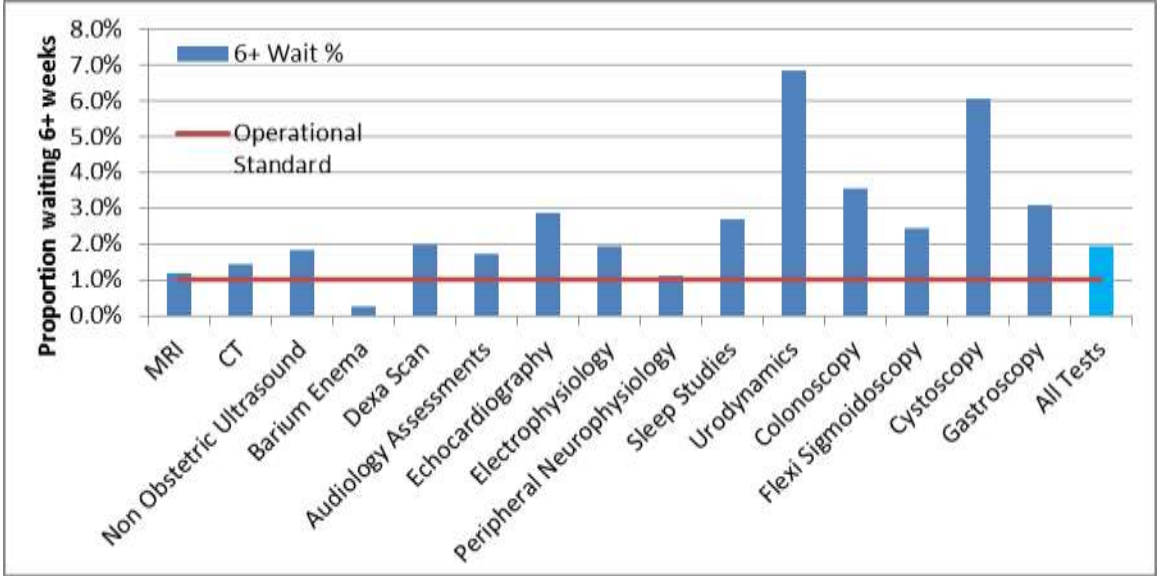
Table 1: Proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test – June 2013 & June 2014.

	Jun-13	Jun-14	Difference (%age points)
MRI	0.8%	1.2%	0.4%
CT	0.4%	1.4%	1.0%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	0.4%	1.8%	1.4%
Barium Enema	0.0%	0.3%	0.3%
Dexa Scan	0.1%	2.0%	1.9%
Audiology Assessments	2.8%	1.7%	-1.1%
Echocardiography	1.3%	2.9%	1.6%
Electrophysiology	1.1%	1.9%	0.8%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	0.5%	1.1%	0.6%
Sleep Studies	2.2%	2.7%	0.5%
Urodynamics	4.9%	6.9%	1.9%
Colonoscopy	2.0%	3.5%	1.5%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	1.0%	2.5%	1.4%
Cystoscopy	3.1%	6.1%	3.0%
Gastroscopy	1.6%	3.1%	1.5%
All Tests	0.9%	1.9%	1.1%

Note: Figures may differ due to rounding.

4.1.3. This month, the 2013/14 operational standard that less than 1% of patients should wait more than 6 weeks from referral for a diagnostic test was met in 1 out of 15 tests. The test with the lowest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was Barium Enema (0.3%) and the test with the highest proportion was Urodynamics (6.9%). (Chart 6)

Chart 6: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test – June 2014



4.1.4. Out of 160 Acute Trusts that submitted this month, 46 providers (28.8%) failed to meet the 1% operational standard.

4.1.5. Of the 211 CCGs, 83 commissioners (39.3%) failed to meet the 1% operational standard.

4.1.6. In total 18 area teams failed to meet the 1% operational standard. South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw Area Team reported the highest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer (5.9%) and Kent and Medway Area Team the lowest (0.3%). (Table 2)

4.1.7. Feedback from NHS trusts has indicated that variations can exist between different area teams due to a variety of reasons from machines breaking down to staff shortages in trusts that usually only affect one area team.

Table 2: June 2014 Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity by Area Team, Commissioner based data

Region	Area Team	Number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer at month end	Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end	Total number of patients waiting at month end	Total activity undertaken in month	Median Waiting Time
North	South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw	1,185	5.9%	20,233	47,471	2.2
South	Bristol, North Somerset, Somerset and South Gloucestershire	1,260	4.8%	26,033	43,794	2.3
South	Thames Valley	1,061	4.4%	24,352	51,871	1.9
South	Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	1,101	4.3%	25,430	51,741	2.0
North	Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	1,194	3.6%	33,067	63,219	2.1
South	Wessex	1,342	3.4%	39,042	78,358	2.1
Midlands & East	Leicestershire and Lincolnshire	812	3.0%	26,955	40,917	2.3
North	Durham, Darlington and Tees	496	2.3%	21,407	42,526	2.1
North	Merseyside	371	2.1%	18,041	44,328	1.9
Midlands & East	Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire	509	2.0%	25,870	54,414	1.7
London	London	2,245	1.8%	126,372	240,123	2.0
North	Greater Manchester	627	1.4%	43,926	80,632	2.0
Midlands & East	Hertfordshire and The South Midlands	521	1.3%	38,619	72,973	1.9
Midlands & East	Shropshire and Staffordshire	311	1.3%	23,495	49,903	2.0
Midlands & East	Arden, Herefordshire and Worcestershire	364	1.3%	28,229	47,600	2.0
Midlands & East	Birmingham and The Black Country	425	1.1%	37,402	67,387	2.0
South	Surrey and Sussex	396	1.1%	34,923	78,050	1.9
North	West Yorkshire	376	1.0%	36,026	67,305	2.0
North	North Yorkshire and Humber	241	0.9%	26,951	51,517	2.0
North	Cheshire, Warrington and Wirral	185	0.9%	21,715	40,583	1.9
Midlands & East	East Anglia	211	0.7%	30,798	67,361	1.9
North	Lancashire	136	0.7%	20,880	41,207	1.8
South	Bath, Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire	138	0.6%	23,455	38,062	2.0
Midlands & East	Essex	87	0.4%	21,713	51,053	1.8
South	Kent and Medway	105	0.3%	31,547	55,344	2.0
England (including all Independent Sector Providers)		15,780	1.9%	809,488	1,580,337	2.0

4.2 Total Waiting List

- 4.2.1. At the end of June 2014 there were a total of 809,000 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test. This is an increase of 121,000 (17.6%) from June 2013. The test with the largest waiting list was Non Obstetric Ultrasound (294,826) accounting for 36.4% of all patients waiting. The test with the smallest waiting list was Barium Enema (1,532) accounting for 0.2% of all patients waiting. (Table 3)

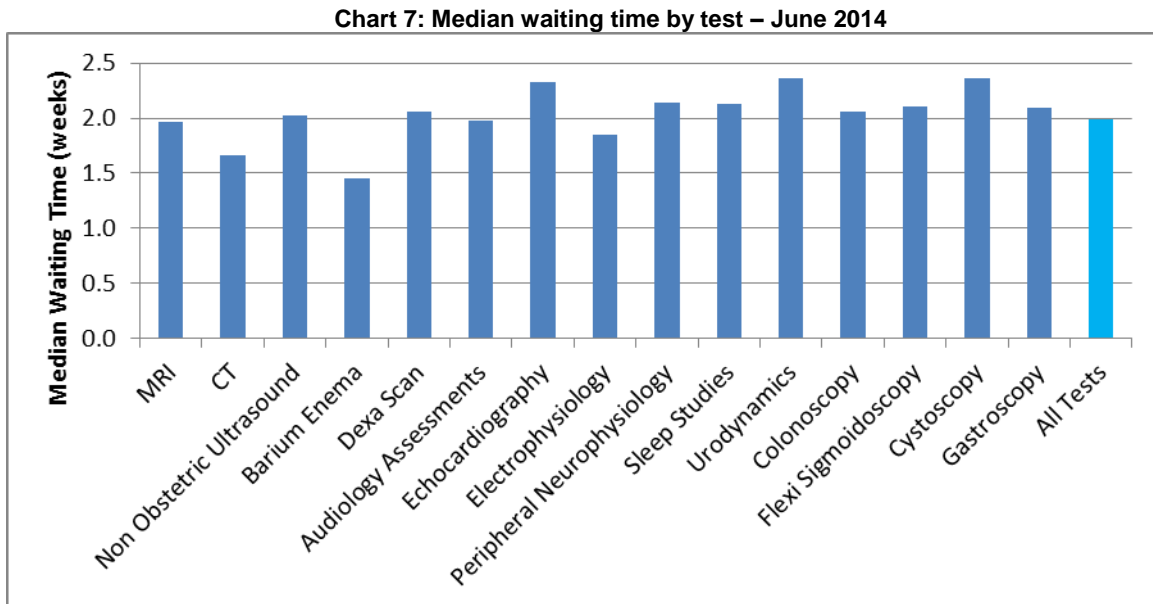
Table 3: Total number of patients waiting at month end, by test – June 2013 & June 2014

	Jun-13	Jun-14	Growth (%age)
MRI	140,718	162,026	15.1%
CT	81,538	100,433	23.2%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	239,861	294,826	22.9%
Barium Enema	1,807	1,532	-15.2%
Dexa Scan	21,344	24,396	14.3%
Audiology Assessments	41,033	44,925	9.5%
Echocardiography	48,971	58,521	19.5%
Electrophysiology	2,300	1,658	-27.9%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	14,323	15,553	8.6%
Sleep Studies	5,347	5,857	9.5%
Urodynamics	4,623	4,298	-7.0%
Colonoscopy	27,763	30,908	11.3%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	14,397	15,158	5.3%
Cystoscopy	12,241	13,841	13.1%
Gastroscopy	32,270	35,556	10.2%
All Tests	688,536	809,488	17.6%

Please note that Barium Enema is a test that should be replaced by colonoscopy or CT Colonography, so the number of tests undertaken should be reducing.

4.3 Median Waiting Times

4.3.1. In June 2014 the estimated median waiting time for all 15 diagnostic tests was 2.0 weeks from time of referral, which is an increase of 0.1 weeks from June 2013. The test with the shortest median waiting time was Barium Enema (1.5 weeks), and the test with the longest waiting time was Cystoscopy (2.4 weeks). (Chart 7)



4.3.2. The area team with the shortest median waiting time Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire Area Team (1.7 weeks). The area team with the longest median waiting time was Bristol, North Somerset, Somerset and South Gloucestershire (2.3 weeks). (Table 2)

4.4 Total Activity

4.4.1. In total 1,580,000 of the 15 key diagnostic tests were performed during June 2014. This is an increase of 153,000 (10.7%) from the same period last year (5.4% when adjusted), (Table 4).

4.4.2. Non Obstetric Ultrasound was the test with the highest activity (552,577 tests), accounting for 35.0% of all activity in June 2014. Electrophysiology was the test with the lowest reported activity (2,515 tests) accounting for 0.2% of all activity.

Table 4: Total Activity & Growth by test

	Jun-14	Jun-13	YTD 14/15	YTD 13/14	Growth Jun 14 vs Jun 13	Growth YTD 14/15 vs YTD 13/14	Adjusted Growth Jun 14 vs Jun 13	Adjusted Growth YTD 14/15 vs YTD 13/14
MRI	240,553	209,061	708,878	631,369	15.1%	12.3%	9.6%	14.1%
CT	384,207	335,474	1,132,815	1,035,532	14.5%	9.4%	9.1%	11.2%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	552,577	504,631	1,619,964	1,557,441	9.5%	4.0%	4.3%	5.7%
Barium Enema	2,910	3,097	8,553	10,309	-6.0%	-17.0%	-10.5%	-15.7%
Dexa Scan	32,494	29,081	98,797	91,093	11.7%	8.5%	6.4%	10.2%
Audiology Assessments	99,675	98,280	297,522	302,051	1.4%	-1.5%	-3.4%	0.1%
Echocardiography	105,974	96,353	308,516	293,244	10.0%	5.2%	4.7%	6.9%
Electrophysiology	2,515	2,671	7,619	7,984	-5.8%	-4.6%	-10.3%	-3.0%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	15,817	15,052	46,944	45,784	5.1%	2.5%	0.1%	4.2%
Sleep Studies	9,802	7,975	27,988	25,128	22.9%	11.4%	17.1%	13.2%
Urodynamics	6,679	6,816	19,735	21,166	-2.0%	-6.8%	-6.7%	-5.2%
Colonoscopy	33,452	32,146	97,985	97,621	4.1%	0.4%	-0.9%	2.0%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	19,164	17,750	57,385	55,757	8.0%	2.9%	2.8%	4.6%
Cystoscopy	23,823	23,211	71,419	72,315	2.6%	-1.2%	-2.3%	0.4%
Gastroscopy	50,695	45,730	150,171	141,116	10.9%	6.4%	5.6%	8.2%
All Tests	1,580,337	1,427,328	4,654,291	4,387,910	10.7%	6.1%	5.4%	7.8%

Please note that Barium Enema is a test that should be replaced by colonoscopy or CT Colonography, so the number of tests undertaken should be reducing.

5 Annex

5.1 Methodology

5.1.1. NHS England compiles diagnostic waiting time and activity data through a central return. Data collected includes:

- The number of patients waiting at the month end, split by test and week.
- Total activity classified as either; Waiting List tests (excluding planned), Planned tests, or Unscheduled Tests.

5.1.2. Providers submit data to NHS England via Unify2 where it checked and signed off by commissioners. For further details on how the data is collected and the Unify2 system, please refer to the [Data Quality and Methodology Statement](#).

5.2 Data Revision

5.2.1. Revisions to published figures are released on a six-monthly basis and in accordance with the NHS England Analytical Services (Operations) team's revision policy. For more information on the revision policy please refer to the [Unify2 Revisions Policy Document](#).

5.3 Data Availability

5.3.1. Monthly diagnostic waiting time and activity data is published on a monthly timetable. The next publication of this report and accompanying data will be 10th September 2014. [A full calendar of all statistical publications can be found here.](#)

5.3.2. In addition to monthly publication, diagnostic waiting time and activity data is also published in a quarterly census and annual report.

5.3.3. [Quarterly census data can be found here.](#)

5.3.4. [Annual Imaging and Radiodiagnostics data can be found here.](#)

5.4 Glossary

Area Team

A geographical area of NHS England with direct commissioning responsibilities for GP services, dental services, pharmacy, and certain aspects of optical services.

Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)

A group of GP practices, which working with other healthcare professionals and in partnership with local communities and local authorities, commission NHS services for patients with in their local communities.

Endoscopy

A categorisation of diagnostic tests that include; Colonoscopy; Flexi sigmoidoscopy; Cystoscopy and Gastroscopy.

Imaging

A categorisation of diagnostic tests that include; Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI); Computed Tomography (CT); Non-obstetric ultrasound; Barium Enema and DEXA Scan.

Median Waiting Time

A measurement of the average time a patient is required to wait for a diagnostic test. The median is the middle value when waiting times are put in numerical order. 50% of patients will wait less than the median. The median is the preferred measurement of average waiting time as it is less susceptible to extreme values than the mean.

Physiological Measurement

A categorisation of diagnostic tests that include; Audiology Assessments; Echocardiology; Electrophysiology: Peripheral Neurophysiology; Sleep Studies and Urodynamics.

Provider

An organisation that provides NHS treatment or care, for example, an NHS Acute Trust, Mental Health Trust, Community provider, or an Independent Sector organisation.

5.5 Feedback welcomed

We welcome feedback on the content and presentation of statistics within this report and those published on the NHS England website.

If you have any comments on this, or any other issues regarding these statistics, then please email unify2@dh.gsi.gov.uk

Alternatively, we welcome your comments via our user feedback form.

Feedback about the user's experiences of using these statistics is available here.

5.6 Additional Information

[Full details of diagnostics data for individual organisations are available here.](#)

For press enquiries please contact the NHS England media team on 0113 825 0958 or 0113 825 0959. Email enquiries should be directed to nhsengland.media@nhs.net

The Government Statistical Service (GSS) statistician responsible for producing these data is:

Chris Gibbins
NHS Operations
NHS England
Room 5E26, Quarry House, Quarry Hill, Leeds LS2 7UE
Email: unify2@dh.gsi.gov.uk