**Longest waits for treatment continue to fall across the** **North West**

The number of people waiting over 18 months for NHS care in the North West continued to fall in April despite continued demand for services. Thanks to the efforts of NHS staff across the region, the number of patients waiting more than 18 months for care fell by over three quarters since the peak.

In the North West, the total number of patients waiting more than 18 months for an appointment has now reduced by 93% since September 2012 to 1,719. In addition the number of people waiting longer than 62 days since their cancer referral has reduced by 3,305 from a peak of 7,397 in October last year.

There is record demand for cancer services, thanks to the success of public awareness campaigns. Nationally, more people than ever before are getting checked and record numbers are starting cancer treatment, with over nine in 10 patients starting treatment within one month across the country.

In Cheshire and Merseyside, Liverpool University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust has also reduced its longest waits from 1,866 at the end of December to 321 by 12 March – a reduction of over 80%. Teams at the Trust have been working across their three hospital sites to make the best use of theatre, diagnostics and outpatient clinic capacity, including operating at weekends and utilising innovative procedures such as robotic surgery in urology and providing day case joint replacements to reduce recovery time, enabling more procedures to be carried out.

Other examples of initiatives across the North West region include:

* Stepping Hill Hospital surgical teams are using a new ‘Mini C-arm’ scanner to speed up diagnosing and operating times for patients, using X-rays to produce real time images. The scanner uses less radiation than other scanners, ensuring safer standards of surgery, and around 500 patients a year will benefit.
* An enhanced Electronic Eyecare Referral System is helping improve eye care in Greater Manchester. Introduced in February 2022, the system has a new functionality that enables primary care optometrists to send high resolution photos to ophthalmologists at the hospital to aid in diagnosis, advice, and guidance. Over 25,000 referrals have been made since February, which is a huge achievement.
* The Set for Surgery programme in Lancashire and South Cumbria is a unique new system that links up GP surgeries and hospitals, giving targeted actions for GPs to work on with their patients before an operation. It helps improve surgical outcomes and means less need for follow-up treatment and further interventions.
* A skin cancer service offered at Clifton Hospital, which is part of Blackpool Hospitals NHS Trust is leading the way in the region – increasing the number of patients who can be seen and reducing appointment cancellations. The tele-dermatology service, running full time at the hospital since 2021, has been a huge success and following a visit by the NHS England Cancer Programme, team members were asked to present at the Faster Diagnosis Collaboration Event – a major NHS event – in February.
* The Lancashire and South Cumbria Neuro-Rehabilitation On-Line (NROL) programme, which is hosted by East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust (ELHT) and the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) uses online video sessions to provide specialist group neuro-rehabilitation to brain injury and stroke survivors.
* Medical staff at St Helens and Knowsley Teaching Hospital are using new technology to get a detailed picture of each patient’s health condition prior to surgery. Using the software, the trust has been able to identify previously “hidden” patients at high risk of chest infections, then intervene with ‘pre-habilitation’ to avoid complications from surgery. It has helped to reduce the average length of stay by up to three days.
* Teams at Liverpool University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust have reduced their longest waits by working across their three hospital sites to make the best use of theatre, diagnostics and outpatient clinic capacity, including operating at weekends; and utilising innovative procedures such as robotic surgery in urology and providing day case joint replacements to reduce recovery time, enabling more procedures to be carried out.
* Cancer specialists across Cheshire and Merseyside are seeing an extra 2,600 patients a month compared to before the pandemic, thanks to initiatives that speed up waits and appointment times – such as a new nasal endoscope service, and a less invasive away of testing for oesophageal cancer involving the swallowing of a small sponge.