**Update on the North West approach to outpatient transformation**

The latest data shows that 86% of patients on waiting lists are waiting for an outpatient appointment. In the North West there are currently 691,545 (April 2023) patients waiting for their first outpatient appointment and 236,196 patients waiting for a follow-up appointment; there is also a significant backlog for patients who have passed their planned review date.

In February 2022 NHS England published set out plans for tackling the elective care backlog that had built up as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic ([found here](https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/delivering-plan-for-tackling-the-covid-19-backlog-of-elective-care/)); since then NHS teams across the North West have made great progress in reducing waiting times, but there is still a substantial way to go, which can only be achieved through new ways of working.

NHS England has set an ambition to reduce the volume of follow-up appointments by 25%, based on the 2019/20 baseline, with the aim of releasing capacity so it can be repurposed to increase first appointment activity, thus decreasing waiting times. At a regional level, the North West system outpatient transformation teams have finalised their collaborative strategy for 2023/24 which aims to achieve this. Through rigorous data analysis and triangulation of health inequality data the biggest opportunities for improvement and impact have been identified across the North West Region. The strategy consists of eight key performance indictors ([found Here](https://future.nhs.uk/NWOutpatientTransformation/groupHome)). They have also developed a data dashboard which brings together all outpatient metrics and assists in identifying themes and trends, as well as monitoring the impact of any initiatives.

The NHS England regional team has adopted a cross-sector pathway approach to ensure the entire patient journey is considered when planning projects. A general practitioner clinical advisor has been recruited to focus on referral optimisation, in particular increasing the utilisation of advice and guidance and reducing unnecessary referrals to secondary care; an allied health professional clinical advisor has also been recruited to progress work on increasing patient initiated follow-up, initially in rheumatology. Bespoke work continues at system and provider level in response to local patient population needs.

The regional team recognises that to adopt a true pathway approach they need to work closely with other programmes such as diagnostics and cancer; work is currently underway to process map patient journeys to ensure patients are ‘clinic ready’ when they attend their first outpatient appointment (more information found [Here](https://future.nhs.uk/NWOutpatientTransformation/view?objectID=33021296)).

The regional team has also worked closely with the national outpatient recovery and transformation team on a piece of work to support standardising discharge according to the latest guidance [found Here](https://future.nhs.uk/OutpatientTransformation/view?objectId=37578416#37578416); this will support delivery of a personalised model of care, help to reduce the number of unnecessary outpatient follow-up appointments, freeing up capacity which will enable reduction of elective waiting lists.

For patients who need an outpatient appointment, the time they wait can be reduced by transforming the model of care and making greater use of technology and there are digital resources available to support outpatient transformation and elective recovery. Remote consultations can support equity of access for patients and help to reduce missed appointments. Patient portals give people greater control of their hospital care experience, allowing them to access relevant information when they need it, schedule care at their convenience and communicate securely with their clinical team. More information can be found here [Digital Enablers](https://gbr01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Ffuture.nhs.uk%2FNWOutpatientTransformation%2Fview%3FobjectId%3D41661680&data=05%7C01%7Ccathystuart%40nhs.net%7C45ed41b6efdc40fff69f08db4b1b5222%7C37c354b285b047f5b22207b48d774ee3%7C0%7C0%7C638186352925699052%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=1gQGgxtgUsVKRZciuWgNhX3sFA8PgWNlotQCf5hpmAA%3D&reserved=0).

There have been several pilots across the region utilising technology to assist with waiting list validation and using e-forms to enable patients to complete pre-appointment questionnaires, which assist clinicians with diagnosis. There is currently a drive to implement patient experience portals in all acute Trusts by September 2023; this brings great opportunity to personalise care, improve patient experience and satisfaction, and empower them to be a partner in their own care.

If you have any examples of innovation or pilots in your area that you would be happy to share across the region and nationally please contact s.christian@nhs.net