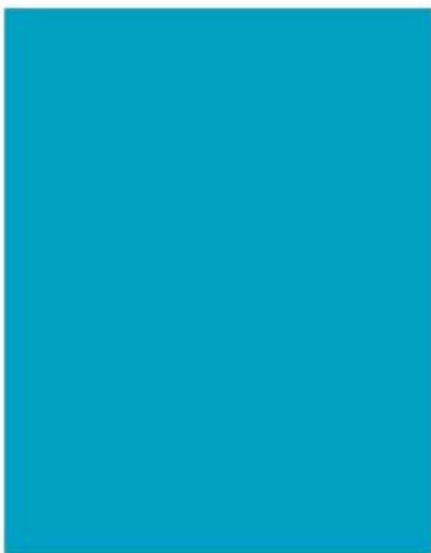


NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data Monthly Report

March 2014



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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 2013/14.

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 guidance document located [here](#):

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.

March 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 March was 12,500. This represents 1.6% 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 5,100 from the end of March 2013.
- The percentage of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has increased by 0.5 percentage points from the same period last year. In between these periods the percentage has fluctuated slightly, with a high of 1.8% (January 2014) and low of 0.7% (October 2013).
- The test with the highest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer in March 2014 was Urodynamics with 6.1% of all patients waiting 6 weeks or longer. The test with the smallest proportion was Barium Enema with 0.2%.
- An alternative measure of diagnostic waiting times is the average (median) waiting time. The average patient waiting for a diagnostic test had been waiting 1.9 weeks at the end of March 2014.
- There were 785,000 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test at the end of March 2014. This is an increase of 108,000 from March 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 1.2%, which is slightly higher than the rise seen in total activity.
- A total of 1,557,000 diagnostic tests were undertaken in March 2014. This is an increase of 11.0% from the same period last year (5.7% when adjusted for working days). In the previous twelve months activity has increased slightly with an average monthly increase of 0.9% (0.5% adjusted).
- Aintree NHS Foundation Trusts failed to submit any data this month due to issues with a new Patient Administration System.
- Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust submitted a partial return due to issues with a new Patient Administration System.

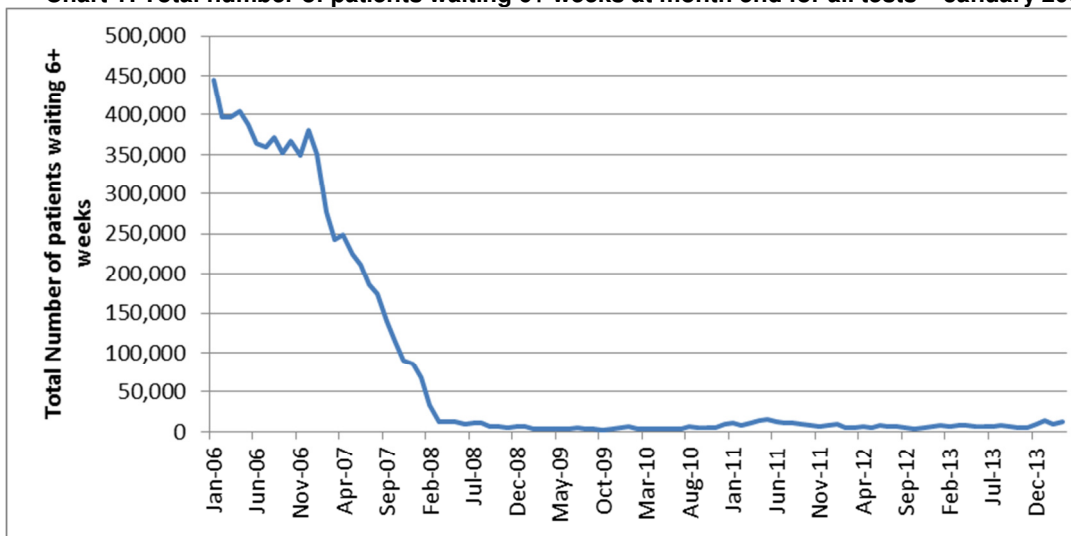
1. National Trends

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

1.1. 6+ Week Waits

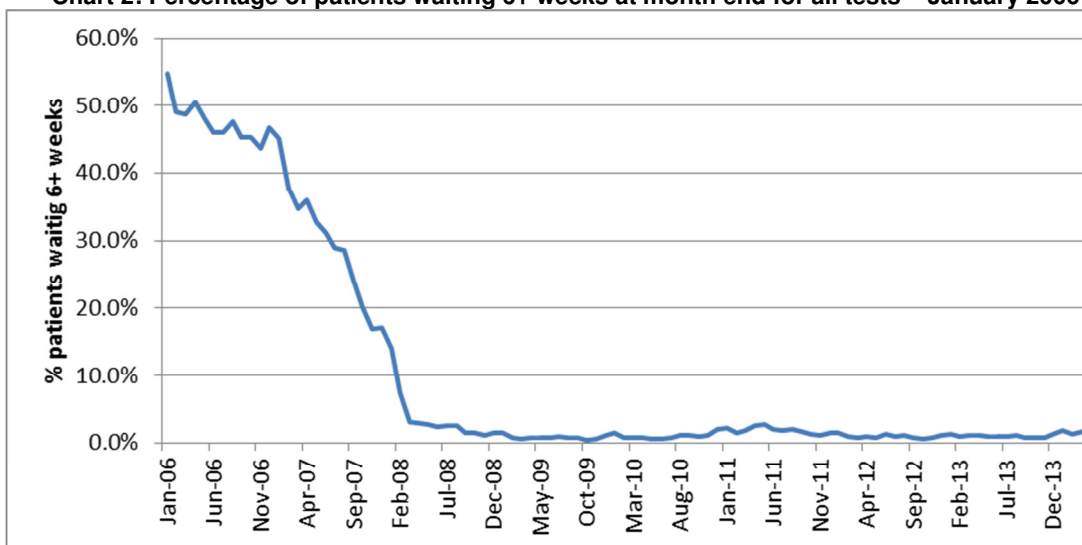
1.1.1. The total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer dropped sharply between January 2007 and March 2008, before maintaining a slight average monthly reduction (Chart 1). This reduction is most likely the result of Trusts working towards the NHS Improvement Plan (June 2004) milestone that no 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 December 2013. Since December the number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has shown an upwards trend.

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



1.1.2. 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). Over the past 12 months it has remained around 1.0% with a low of 0.7% (October 2013) and a high of 1.8% (January 2014). In this period the 1% operational standard has been met 6 times.

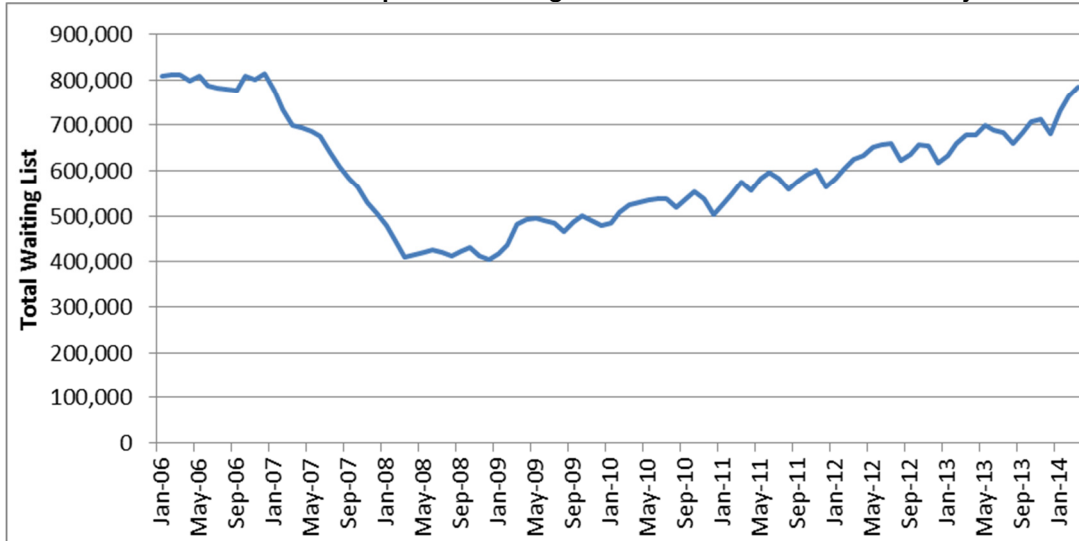
Chart 2: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests – January 2006 to March 2014



1.2. Total Waiting List

1.2.1. 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 1.2%.

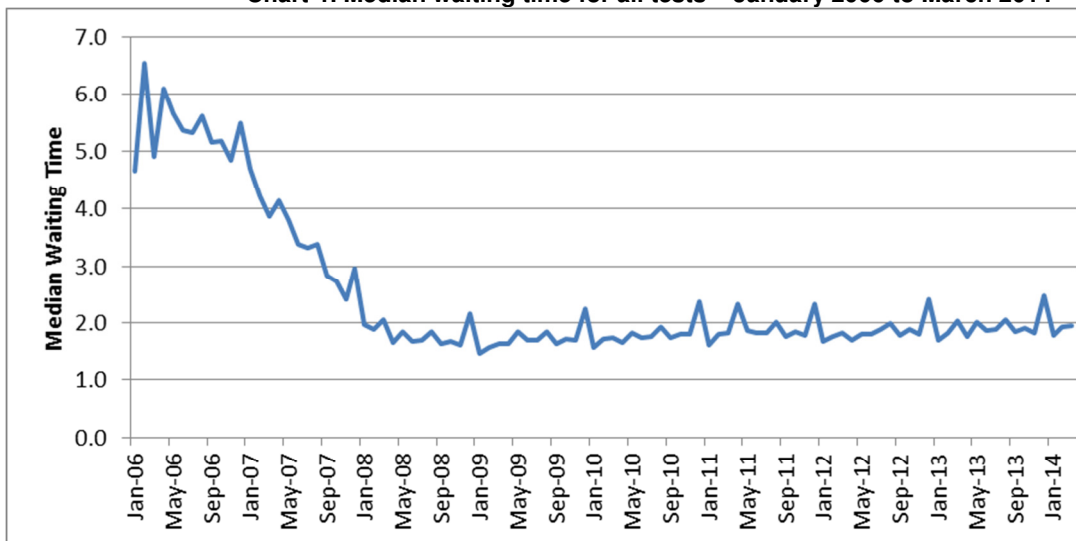
Chart 3: Total number of patients waiting at month end for all tests – January 2006 to March 2014



1.3. Median Waiting Time

1.3.1. 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 1.9 weeks, with a high of 2.5 weeks (December 2013) and a low of 1.8 weeks (April 2013).

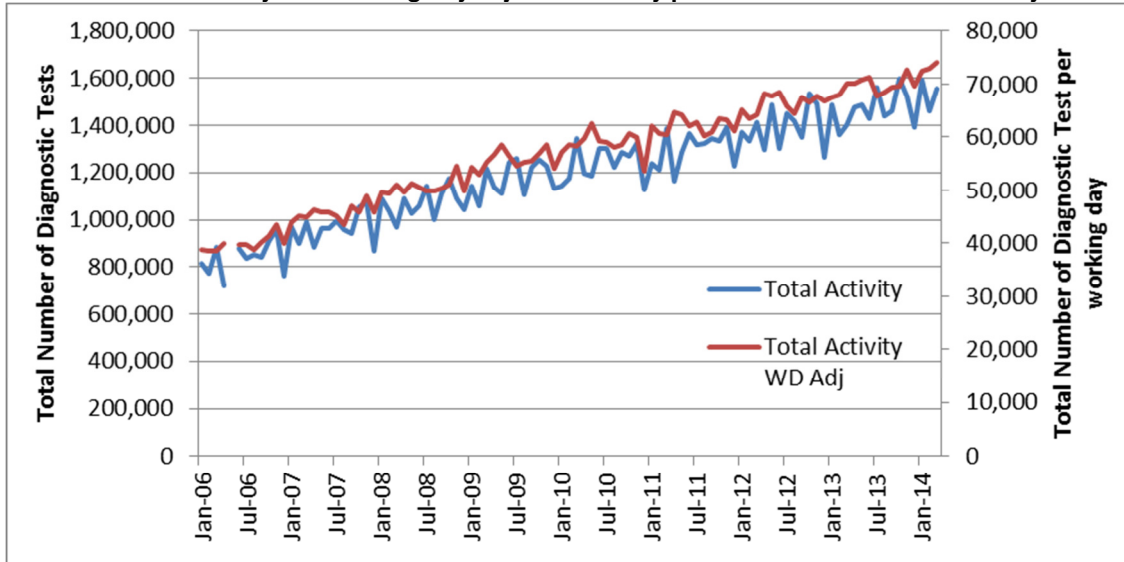
Chart 4: Median waiting time for all tests – January 2006 to March 2014



1.4. Total Activity

1.4.1. 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 – January 2006 to March 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.

1.4.2. Monthly activity has increased steadily over the last 12 months with an average monthly increase of 0.9%.

1.4.3. In the previous twelve months individual tests are showing small increases in activity with the exception of Dexa Scan, which has shown an average monthly increase of 2.4%.

2. March 2014 Data

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

Please note that this month Aintree NHS Foundation Trust failed to submit any data and Walsall Healthcare NHS Trust submitted partial data.

2.1. 6+ Week Waits

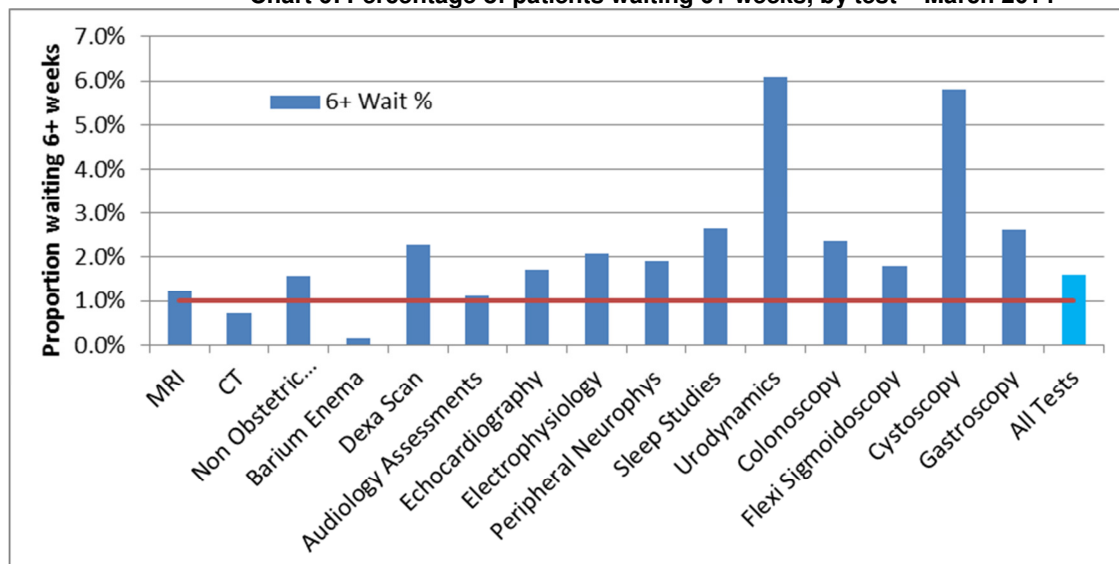
- 2.1.1. At the end of March 2014, there were a total of 12,500 patients waiting 6 weeks or longer from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests. This represents 1.6% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month. The number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has shown an increase of 5,100 from the same period last year. The proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has increased by 0.5 percentage points from March 2013.
- 2.1.2. Compared to March 2013, Dexa Scan has shown the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer for a diagnostic test (2.2 percentage points). Audiology Assessments has shown the largest decrease from March 2013 (-1.7 percentage points). (Table 1)

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

	Mar-13	Mar-14	Difference (%age points)
MRI	1.4%	1.2%	-0.2%
CT	0.2%	0.7%	0.5%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	0.4%	1.6%	1.2%
Barium Enema	0.2%	0.2%	0.0%
Dexa Scan	0.1%	2.3%	2.2%
Audiology Assessments	2.8%	1.1%	-1.7%
Echocardiography	1.1%	1.7%	0.6%
Electrophysiology	3.4%	2.1%	-1.3%
Peripheral Neurophys	0.5%	1.9%	1.4%
Sleep Studies	3.2%	2.6%	-0.6%
Urodynamics	4.4%	6.1%	1.7%
Colonoscopy	2.8%	2.4%	-0.5%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	2.3%	1.8%	-0.5%
Cystoscopy	3.9%	5.8%	1.9%
Gastroscopy	2.4%	2.6%	0.3%
All Tests	1.1%	1.6%	0.5%

2.1.3. 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 2 out of 15 tests. The test with the lowest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was Barium Enema (0.2%) and the test with the highest proportion was Urodynamics (6.1%). (Chart 6)

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



2.1.4. Out of 159 Acute Trusts that submitted this month, 36 providers (22.6%) failed to meet the 1% operational standard.

2.1.5. Of the 211 CCGs, 73 commissioners (34.6%) failed to meet the 1% operational standard.

2.1.6. In total 14 area teams failed to meet the 1% operational standard. Thames Valley Area Team reported the highest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer (7.2%) and Durham, Darlington and Tees Area Team the lowest (0.4%). (Table 2)

2.1.7. 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: March 2014 Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity by Area Team, Commissioner based data

Region	Area Team	Number of patient's 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
South	Thames Valley	1,798	7.2%	25,146	51,036	2.1
South	Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	947	3.7%	25,744	49,768	2.0
London	London	3,273	2.6%	126,237	241,475	2.0
South	Wessex	880	2.3%	38,561	77,638	2.0
North	South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw	363	2.0%	17,864	48,802	1.9
Midlands & East	Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire	471	1.9%	24,796	54,463	1.7
South	Surrey and Sussex	647	1.9%	34,481	75,564	1.9
Midlands & East	Hertfordshire and The South Midlands	594	1.6%	36,388	72,517	1.9
North	Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	459	1.4%	32,022	63,885	1.9
Midlands & East	Leicestershire and Lincolnshire	337	1.3%	25,219	40,847	2.1
North	Lancashire	268	1.3%	21,120	40,703	1.8
South	Bristol, North Somerset, Somerset and South Gloucestershire	264	1.1%	23,862	44,478	2.0
North	Merseyside	158	1.1%	14,570	33,944	1.9
North	West Yorkshire	358	1.0%	35,245	67,263	1.9
North	Cheshire, Warrington and Wirral	205	0.9%	22,942	40,578	1.9
North	Greater Manchester	402	0.9%	45,123	77,663	2.0
Midlands & East	Birmingham and The Black Country	237	0.7%	35,907	66,258	2.2
Midlands & East	Shropshire and Staffordshire	146	0.6%	22,527	48,764	1.9
Midlands & East	Arden, Herefordshire and Worcestershire	124	0.4%	27,783	48,897	1.9
South	Bath, Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire	91	0.4%	21,633	40,406	2.0
North	North Yorkshire and Humber	107	0.4%	25,862	52,419	1.9
Midlands & East	Essex	94	0.4%	23,003	51,739	1.9
South	Kent and Medway	98	0.4%	25,710	51,797	1.9
Midlands & East	East Anglia	113	0.4%	31,177	65,125	1.9
North	Durham, Darlington and Tees	73	0.4%	20,755	41,740	2.0
England (including all Independent Sector Providers)		12,538	1.6%	785,342	1,557,219	1.9

2.2. Total Waiting List

2.2.1. At the end of March 2014 there were a total of 785,000 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test. This is an increase of 108,000 (15.9%) from March 2013. The test with the largest waiting list was Non Obstetric Ultrasound (290,381) accounting for 37.0% of all patients waiting. The test with the smallest waiting list was Barium Enema (1,329) accounting for 0.2% of all patients waiting. (Table 3)

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

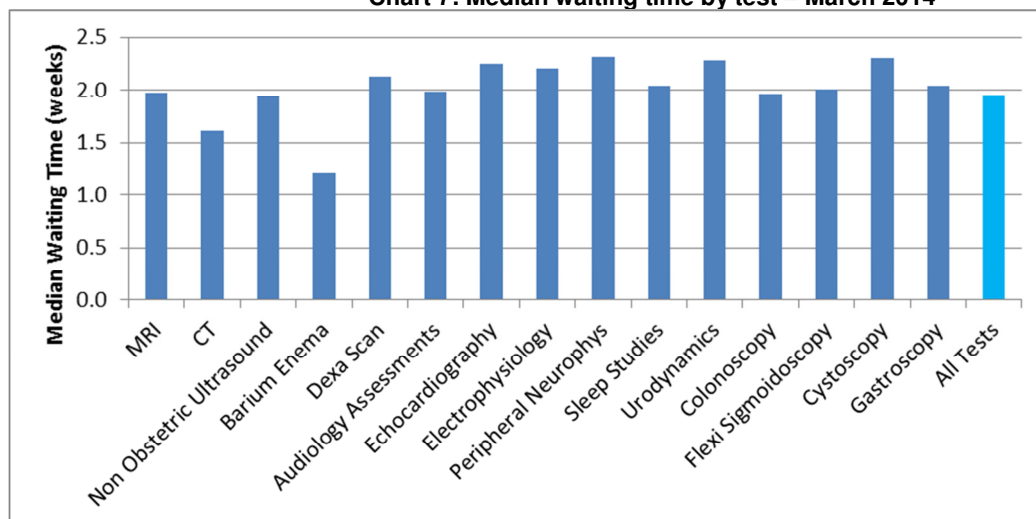
	Mar-13	Mar-14	Growth (%age)
MRI	131,087	156,477	19.4%
CT	82,873	93,883	13.3%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	245,054	290,381	18.5%
Barium Enema	1,867	1,329	-28.8%
Dexa Scan	20,823	27,577	32.4%
Audiology Assessments	40,660	44,151	8.6%
Echocardiography	44,959	50,785	13.0%
Electrophysiology	1,727	1,772	2.6%
Peripheral Neurophys	13,510	16,140	19.5%
Sleep Studies	5,051	5,178	2.5%
Urodynamics	4,568	4,152	-9.1%
Colonoscopy	26,904	28,431	5.7%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	14,497	15,239	5.1%
Cystoscopy	12,785	13,061	2.2%
Gastroscopy	31,366	36,786	17.3%
All Tests	677,731	785,342	15.9%

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.

2.3. Median Waiting Times

2.3.1. In March 2014 the estimated median waiting time for all 15 diagnostic tests was 1.9 weeks from time of referral, which is a decrease of 0.1 weeks from March 2013. The test with the shortest median waiting time was Barium Enema (1.2 weeks), and the test with the longest waiting time was Peripheral Neurophysiology (2.3 weeks). (Chart 7)

Chart 7: Median waiting time by test – March 2014



2.3.2. 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 Birmingham and The Black Country (2.2 weeks). (Table 2)

2.4. Total Activity

2.4.1. In total 1,557,000 of the 15 key diagnostic tests were performed during March 2014. This is an increase of 154,000 (11.0%) from the same period last year (5.7% adjusted for working days). Total activity for the year has increased by 6.7% compared to last year (5.0% adjusted). (Table 4)

Table 4: Total Activity & Growth by test

	Mar-14	Mar-13	YTD 13/14	YTD 12/13	Growth Mar 14 vs Mar 13	Growth YTD 13/14 vs YTD 12/13	Adjusted Growth Mar 14 vs Mar 13	Adjusted Growth YTD 13/14 vs YTD 12/13
MRI	239,505	208,029	2,666,107	2,407,441	15.1%	10.7%	9.6%	9.0%
CT	377,591	339,419	4,284,304	3,966,109	11.2%	8.0%	5.9%	6.3%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	537,428	489,473	6,312,886	5,918,780	9.8%	6.7%	4.6%	5.0%
Barium Enema	2,873	3,553	37,351	57,060	-19.1%	-34.5%	-23.0%	-35.6%
Dexa Scan	31,347	27,311	377,115	337,105	14.8%	11.9%	9.3%	10.1%
Audiology Assessments	100,118	90,266	1,201,940	1,179,634	10.9%	1.9%	5.6%	0.3%
Echocardiography	100,071	90,673	1,184,260	1,110,874	10.4%	6.6%	5.1%	4.9%
Electrophysiology	3,530	4,068	32,846	32,477	-13.2%	1.1%	-17.4%	-0.5%
Peripheral Neurophys	15,786	13,754	183,365	172,734	14.8%	6.2%	9.3%	4.5%
Sleep Studies	8,915	8,545	104,595	96,506	4.3%	8.4%	-0.6%	6.7%
Urodynamics	6,662	6,609	83,580	87,837	0.8%	-4.8%	-4.0%	-6.3%
Colonoscopy	34,783	32,504	400,960	399,637	7.0%	0.3%	1.9%	-1.2%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	20,113	18,170	228,737	232,674	10.7%	-1.7%	5.4%	-3.2%
Cystoscopy	25,475	24,353	295,889	289,993	4.6%	2.0%	-0.4%	0.4%
Gastroscopy	53,022	46,303	586,111	557,896	14.5%	5.1%	9.1%	3.4%
All Tests	1,557,219	1,403,030	17,980,046	16,846,757	11.0%	6.7%	5.7%	5.0%

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.

2.4.2. Non Obstetric Ultrasound was the test with the highest activity (537,428 tests), accounting for 34.5% of all activity in March 2014. Barium Enema was the test with the lowest reported activity (2,873 tests) accounting for 0.2% of all activity.

3. Annex

3.1. Methodology

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.

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](#).

3.2. Data Revision

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](#).

3.3. Data Availability

Monthly diagnostic waiting time and activity data is published on a monthly timetable. The next publication of this report and accompanying data will be **11th June 2014**. A full calendar of all statistical publications can be found here: <http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/12-months-statistics-calendar/>

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

Quarterly census data can be found here: <http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/diagnostics-census-data/>

Annual Imaging and Radiodiagnostics data can be found here: <http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/imaging-and-radiodiagnostics-annual-data/>

3.4. 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.

3.5. 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](#).

3.6. Additional Information

Full details of diagnostics data for individual organisations are available at: <http://www.england.nhs.uk/statistics/statistical-work-areas/diagnostics-waiting-times-and-activity/>

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

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