



NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

NHS Diagnostic Waiting Times and Activity Data

October 2014 Monthly Report

Version number: 1

First published: 10th December 2014

Prepared by: NHS England Analytical Services (Operations)

Contents

- Contents 3
- 1 Executive summary 4
- 2 October 2014 Key Findings 6
- 3 National Trends 7
 - 3.1 6+ Week Waits 7
 - 3.2 Total Waiting List 8
 - 3.3 Median Waiting Time 9
 - 3.4 Total Activity 10
- 4 October 2014 Data 11
 - 4.1 6+ Week Waits 11
 - 4.2 Total Waiting List 15
 - 4.3 Median Waiting Times 16
 - 4.4 Total Activity 16
- 5 Annex 18
 - 5.1 Methodology 18
 - 5.2 Data Revision 18
 - 5.3 Data Availability 18
 - 5.4 Glossary 18
 - 5.5 Feedback welcomed 19
 - 5.6 Additional Information 19

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:

- Imaging - Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI)
- Imaging - Computerised Tomography (CT)
- Imaging - Non-obstetric Ultrasound
- Imaging - Barium Enema
- Imaging - Dual-Energy X-Ray Absorptiometry (DEXA) Scan
- Physiological Measurement - Audiology Assessments
- Physiological Measurement - Echocardiography
- Physiological Measurement - Electrophysiology
- Physiological Measurement - Neurophysiology – peripheral neurophysiology
- Physiological Measurement - Respiratory Physiology – sleep studies
- Physiological Measurements - Urodynamics – pressures & flows
- Endoscopy - Gastroscopy
- Endoscopy - Colonoscopy
- Endoscopy - Flexible Sigmoidoscopy
- Endoscopy - 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 October 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 October 2014 was 10,200. This represents 1.3% 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 5,000 from the end of October 2013.
- The percentage of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer in October 2014 has increased by 0.6 percentage points from the same period last year. In between these periods the percentage has shown an increasing trend followed by a slight decrease, with a peak 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 October 2014 was Urodynamics with 7.8% 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 1.9 weeks at the end of October 2014.
- There were 789,200 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test at the end of October 2014. This is an increase of 81,200 from October 2013. In the past twelve months the total number of patients waiting for a diagnostic test has continued to increase with an average monthly increase of 0.9%. This is higher than the average monthly increase in activity.
- A total of 1,679,600 diagnostic tests were undertaken in October 2014. This is an increase of 4.9% from the same period last year. In the previous twelve months activity has continued to increase with an average monthly increase of 0.4%.
- Princess Alexandra Hospital NHS Trust failed to submit any diagnostic data this month, due to issues with their Patient Administration System.

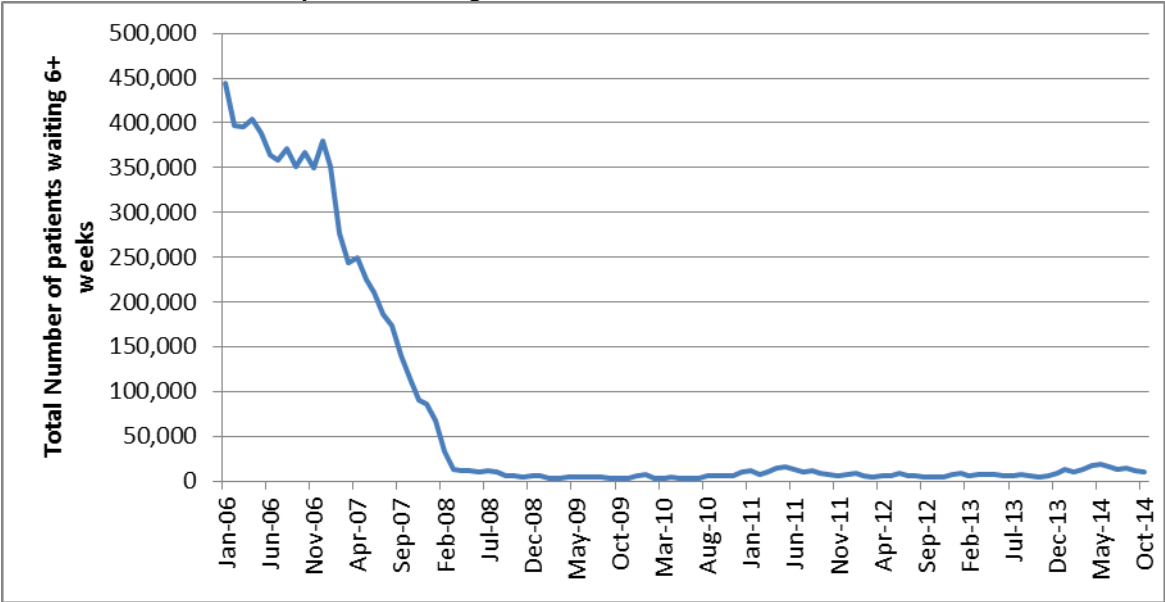
3 National Trends

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

3.1 6+ Week Waits

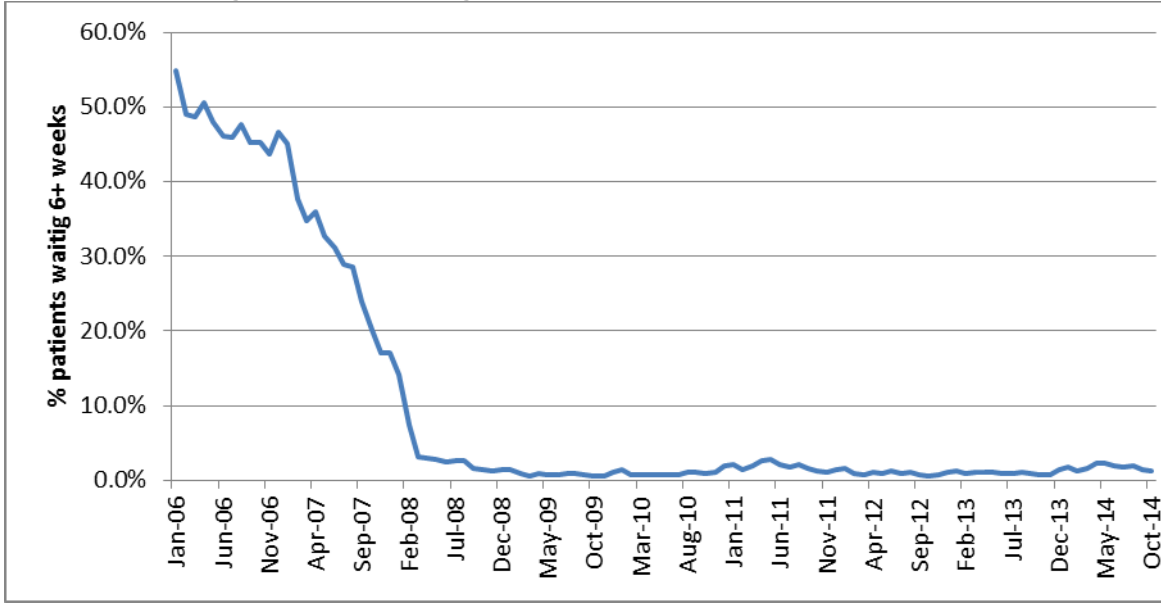
3.1.1. The total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer dropped sharply between January 2007 and March 2008, before maintaining a slight average monthly reduction (Chart 1). This reduction is most likely the result of Trusts working towards the NHS Improvement Plan (June 2004) milestone that no one should wait longer than 6 weeks for a diagnostic test by March 2008. Between March 2008 and October 2013 the total number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer was showing a steady reduction. Between October 2013 and May 2014 the number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has increased significantly, although in recent months that number has been decreasing slightly.

Chart 1: Total number of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests – Jan 2006 to Oct 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). Over the past 12 months the proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has shown 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.

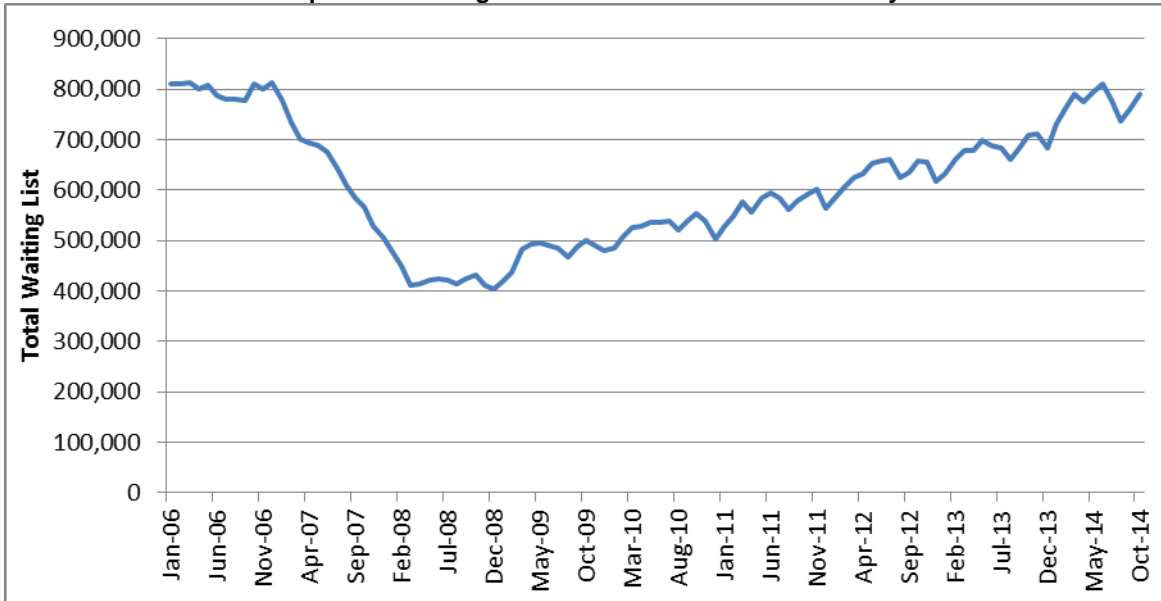
Chart 2: Percentage of patients waiting 6+ weeks at month end for all tests – Jan 2006 to Oct 2014



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 0.9%.

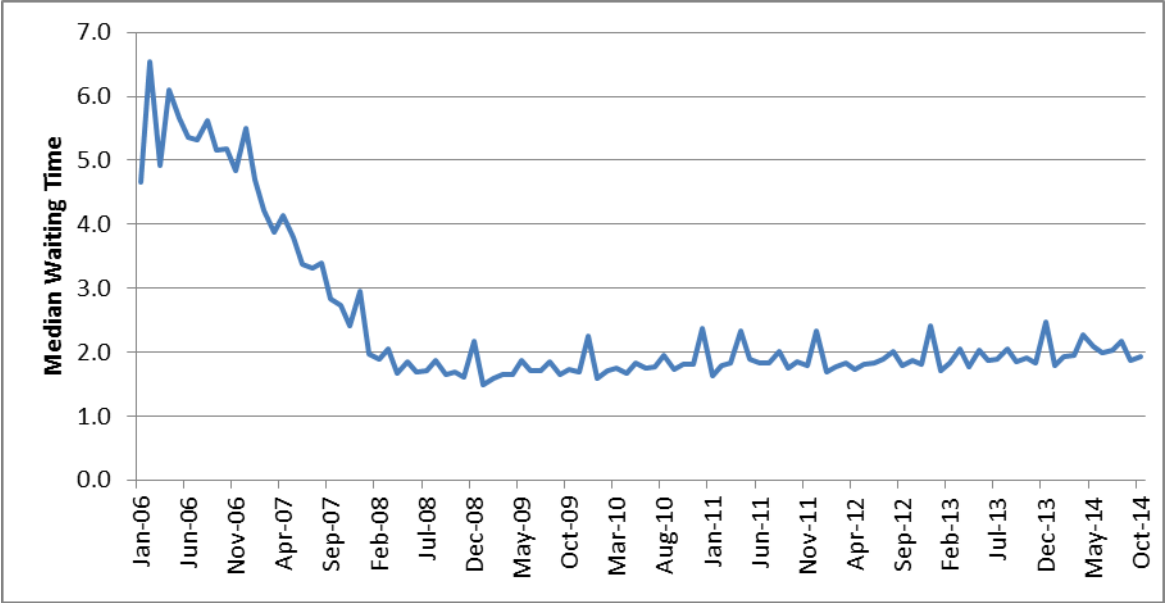
Chart 3: Total number of patients waiting at month end for all tests – January 2006 to October 2014



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).

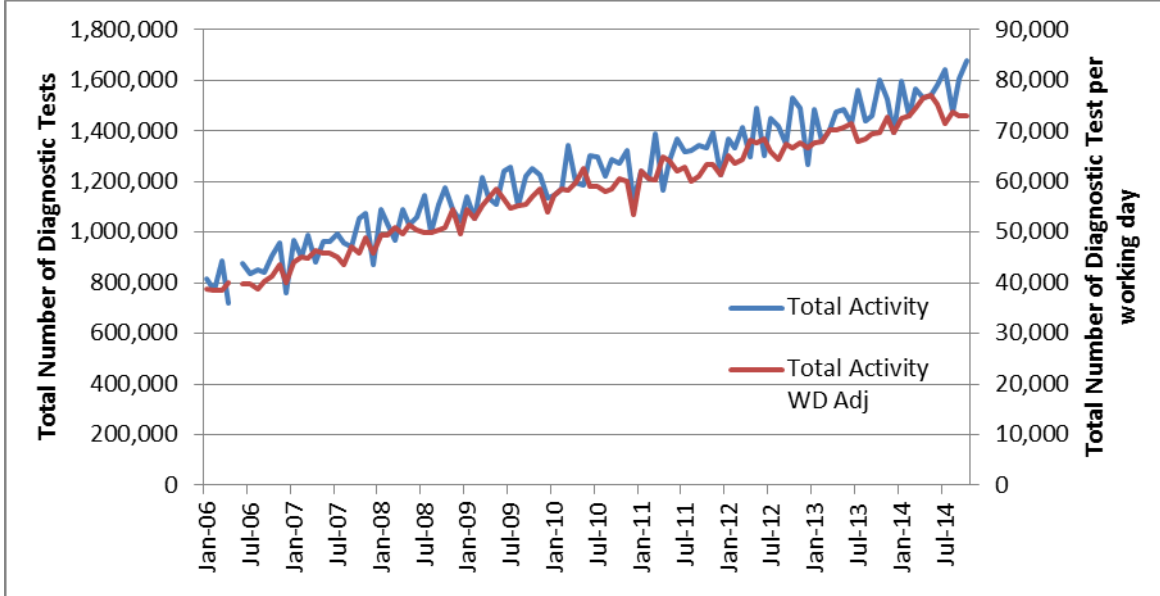
Chart 4: Median waiting time for all tests – January 2006 to October 2014



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 Oct 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 0.4% (0.4% when adjusted for working days).
- 3.4.3. In the previous twelve months, individual tests have shown slight changes in activity. The largest changes have been for Sleep Studies, which have shown an average monthly increase of 1.8%. The test with the largest reduction in activity was Electrophysiology, which have shown an average monthly decrease of 0.4%

4 October 2014 Data

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

4.1 6+ Week Waits

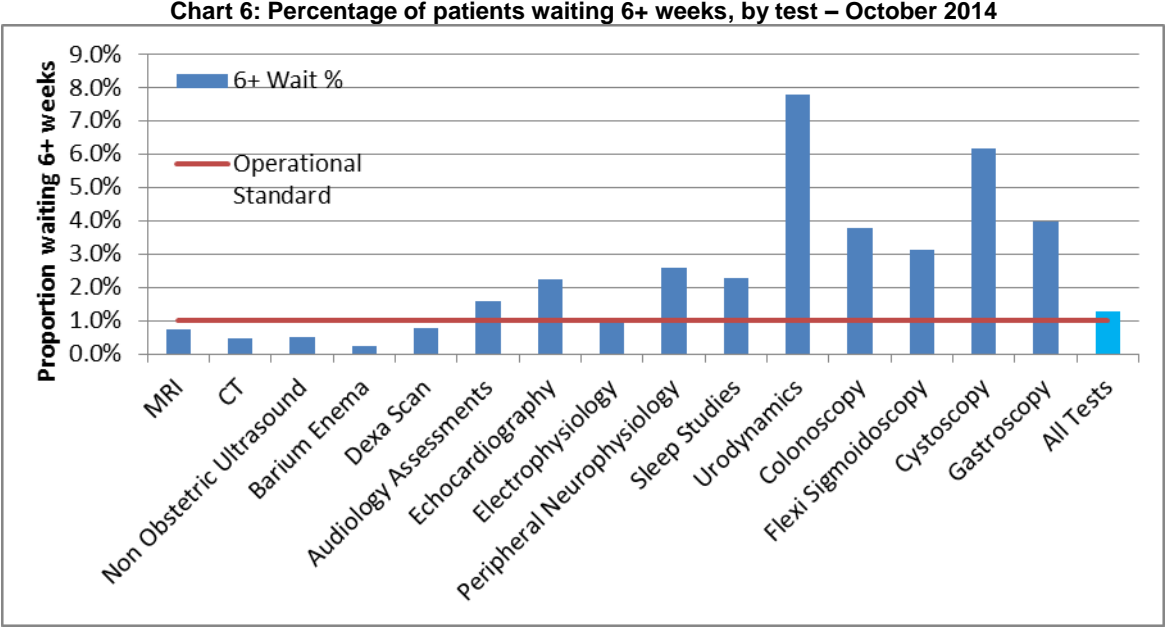
- 4.1.1. At the end of October 2014, there were a total of 10,200 patients waiting 6 weeks or longer from referral for one of the 15 key diagnostic tests. This represents 1.3% of the total number of patients waiting at the end of the month. The number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has shown an increase of 5,000 from the same period last year. The proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer has increased by 0.6 percentage points from October 2013.
- 4.1.2. Compared to October 2013, Cystoscopy has shown the largest increase in the proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer for a diagnostic test. (3.5 percentage points). Non Obstetric Ultrasound, Barium Enema and Audiology Assessments have all shown the smallest increases (0.1 percentage points).

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

	Oct-13	Oct-14	Difference (%age points)
MRI	0.6%	0.7%	0.2%
CT	0.1%	0.5%	0.3%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	0.5%	0.5%	0.1%
Barium Enema	0.1%	0.3%	0.1%
Dexa Scan	0.6%	0.8%	0.2%
Audiology Assessments	1.5%	1.6%	0.1%
Echocardiography	0.8%	2.3%	1.5%
Electrophysiology	0.4%	1.0%	0.6%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	1.3%	2.6%	1.4%
Sleep Studies	0.7%	2.3%	1.6%
Urodynamics	6.3%	7.8%	1.5%
Colonoscopy	2.0%	3.8%	1.8%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	0.9%	3.1%	2.2%
Cystoscopy	2.7%	6.2%	3.5%
Gastroscopy	1.6%	4.0%	2.4%
All Tests	0.7%	1.3%	0.6%

Note: Figures may differ due to rounding.

4.1.3. This month, the operational standard that less than 1% of patients should wait 6 weeks or more from referral for a diagnostic test was met in 6 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 (7.8%). (Chart 6).



4.1.4. In addition to the key diagnostic tests, it’s possible to look at performance across 3 different test types (Imaging, Physiological Measurement, and Endoscopy). The proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer for a diagnostic test at the end of October 2014 increased for all 3 test types compared to October 2013. Endoscopy tests have shown the largest increase (2.3 percentage points), while Imaging tests have shown the smallest increase (0.1 percentage points). See section 5.4 for which tests are included under the different test types.

Table 2: Proportion of patients waiting 6+ weeks, by test type – October 2013 & October 2014

	Oct-13	Oct-14	Difference (%age points)
Imaging	0.4%	0.6%	0.1%
Physiological Measurement	1.3%	2.3%	1.0%
Endoscopy	1.8%	4.1%	2.3%
All Tests	0.7%	1.3%	0.6%

Note: Figures may differ due to rounding.

4.1.5. Overall, the number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer for an Imaging test decreased by 698 this month. The number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer for an Imaging test has decreased each month since May 2014. The number of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer for Physiological Measurement tests and Endoscopy tests also fell this month by 174 and 25 respectively.

- 4.1.6. Out of 155 Acute Trusts that submitted in October 2014, 42 providers (27.1%) failed to meet the 1% operational standard.
- 4.1.7. Of the 211 CCGs, 78 commissioners (37.0%) failed to meet the 1% operational standard. This is 3 fewer CCG's commissioners than in the previous month, but 47 more commissioners than in October 2013.
- 4.1.8. In total 14 area teams failed to meet the 1% operational standard. 'Durham, Darlington and Tees Area Team' reported the highest proportion of patients waiting 6 weeks or longer (4.2%) while 'Bath, Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire Area Team' and 'Merseyside Area Team' reported the lowest (0.3%). (Table 2).
- 4.1.9. 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 3: October 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	Durham, Darlington and Tees	905	4.2%	21,548	43,701	2.2
North	South Yorkshire and Bassetlaw	624	3.4%	18,422	51,788	2.0
Midlands & East	Birmingham and The Black Country	938	2.5%	37,711	70,190	2.2
Midlands & East	Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire	562	2.2%	25,347	58,319	1.7
South	Bristol, North Somerset, Somerset and South Gloucestershire	539	2.2%	24,858	49,959	2.1
South	Devon, Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	485	2.1%	23,615	54,276	1.8
North	Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear	673	1.9%	34,691	67,667	2.0
North	Lancashire	314	1.5%	20,437	44,422	1.8
London	London	1,621	1.3%	124,071	251,179	1.9
South	Thames Valley	265	1.2%	21,546	61,489	1.9
North	Greater Manchester	526	1.2%	43,259	86,160	2.0
Midlands & East	Shropshire and Staffordshire	284	1.1%	25,022	52,419	2.0
Midlands & East	Arden, Herefordshire and Worcestershire	301	1.0%	29,578	51,238	2.0
Midlands & East	Hertfordshire and The South Midlands	384	1.0%	38,048	71,933	1.9
South	Kent and Medway	278	0.9%	32,119	62,349	2.1
Midlands & East	East Anglia	257	0.8%	32,721	68,872	2.1
North	North Yorkshire and Humber	191	0.7%	26,140	53,852	1.8
South	Wessex	255	0.7%	37,481	86,809	1.9
South	Surrey and Sussex	217	0.7%	32,588	83,003	1.8
Midlands & East	Leicestershire and Lincolnshire	156	0.7%	23,701	44,272	2.0
North	West Yorkshire	175	0.5%	33,082	71,312	1.9
North	Cheshire, Warrington and Wirral	81	0.4%	20,966	43,334	1.8
Midlands & East	Essex	72	0.4%	18,909	48,089	1.8
North	Merseyside	57	0.3%	18,536	46,043	1.8
South	Bath, Gloucestershire, Swindon and Wiltshire	58	0.3%	21,703	42,085	2.0
England (including all Independent Sector Providers)		10,237	1.3%	789,184	1,679,572	1.9

4.2 Total Waiting List

4.2.1. At the end of October 2014 there were a total of 789,200 patients still waiting for a diagnostic test. This is an increase of 81,200 (11.5%) from October 2013. The test with the largest waiting list was Non Obstetric Ultrasound (276,585) accounting for 35.0% of all patients waiting. The test with the smallest waiting list was Barium Enema (1,596) accounting for 0.2% of all patients waiting. (Table 3).

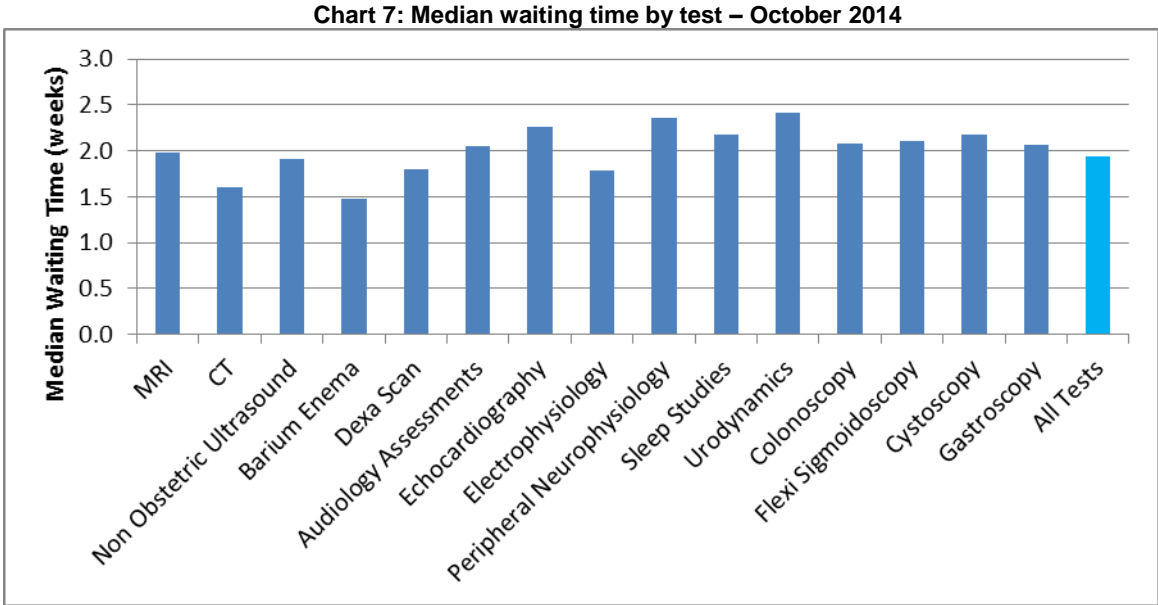
Table 4: Total number of patients waiting at month end, by test – October 2013 & October 2014

	Oct-13	Oct-14	Growth (%age)
MRI	152,788	168,435	10.2%
CT	81,964	95,256	16.2%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	248,334	276,585	11.4%
Barium Enema	1,562	1,596	2.2%
Dexa Scan	22,837	21,360	-6.5%
Audiology Assessments	39,480	43,738	10.8%
Echocardiography	46,993	52,475	11.7%
Electrophysiology	2,096	1,645	-21.5%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	15,452	16,678	7.9%
Sleep Studies	5,103	5,923	16.1%
Urodynamics	4,439	4,443	0.1%
Colonoscopy	28,084	33,314	18.6%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	14,510	16,344	12.6%
Cystoscopy	12,159	14,272	17.4%
Gastroscopy	32,148	37,120	15.5%
All Tests	707,949	789,184	11.5%

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 October 2014 the estimated median waiting time for all 15 diagnostic tests was 1.9 weeks from time of referral, which is the same as it was in October 2013 (to 1 decimal place). The test with the shortest median waiting time was Barium Enema (1.5 weeks), and the test with the longest waiting time was Urodynamics (2.4 weeks). (Chart 7)



4.3.2. The area teams with the shortest median waiting time were ‘Derbyshire & Nottinghamshire Area Team’ (1.7 weeks). The area teams with the longest median waiting time were ‘Birmingham and The Black Country Area Team’ and ‘Durham, Darlington and Tees Area Team’ (2.2 weeks). (Table 2)

4.4 Total Activity

- 4.4.1. In total 1,679,600 of the 15 key diagnostic tests were performed during October 2014. This is an increase of 79,100 (4.9%) from the same period last year (Table 4).
- 4.4.2. The number of diagnostic tests undertaken in October 2014 was the highest for any month since collection of the data began in January 2006.
- 4.4.3. Non Obstetric Ultrasound was the test with the highest activity (581,606 tests), accounting for 34.6% of all activity in October 2014. Electrophysiology was the test with the lowest reported activity (2,735 tests) accounting for 0.2% of all activity.

Table 5: Total Activity & Growth by test

	Oct-14	Oct-13	YTD 14/15	YTD 13/14	Growth Oct 14 vs Oct 13	Growth YTD 14/15 vs YTD 13/14	Adjusted Growth Oct 14 vs Oct 13	Adjusted Growth YTD 14/15 vs YTD 13/14
MRI	252,804	235,324	1,686,637	1,523,934	7.4%	10.7%	7.4%	11.4%
CT	406,416	376,082	2,701,553	2,469,885	8.1%	9.4%	8.1%	10.1%
Non Obstetric Ultrasound	581,606	569,280	3,832,443	3,691,770	2.2%	3.8%	2.2%	4.5%
Barium Enema	3,127	3,230	20,548	22,717	-3.2%	-9.5%	-3.2%	-8.9%
Dexa Scan	36,240	34,905	233,332	222,250	3.8%	5.0%	3.8%	5.7%
Audiology Assessments	106,275	107,783	700,050	713,034	-1.4%	-1.8%	-1.4%	-1.2%
Echocardiography	111,908	104,377	739,186	693,926	7.2%	6.5%	7.2%	7.2%
Electrophysiology	2,735	2,857	17,590	19,346	-4.3%	-9.1%	-4.3%	-8.5%
Peripheral Neurophysiology	18,357	16,784	112,582	107,061	9.4%	5.2%	9.4%	5.9%
Sleep Studies	11,234	9,044	69,443	60,560	24.2%	14.7%	24.2%	15.4%
Urodynamics	7,355	7,566	46,398	50,147	-2.8%	-7.5%	-2.8%	-6.9%
Colonoscopy	39,557	36,289	241,180	232,992	9.0%	3.5%	9.0%	4.2%
Flexi Sigmoidoscopy	21,642	20,127	137,190	131,450	7.5%	4.4%	7.5%	5.1%
Cystoscopy	27,197	25,242	171,287	170,178	7.7%	0.7%	7.7%	1.3%
Gastroscopy	53,119	51,550	352,118	337,371	3.0%	4.4%	3.0%	5.1%
All Tests	1,679,572	1,600,440	11,061,537	10,446,621	4.9%	5.9%	4.9%	6.6%

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.

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 7th January 2015. [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 5E24, Quarry House, Quarry Hill, Leeds LS2 7UE
Email: unify2@dh.gsi.gov.uk