

# Measuring what matters

Update on the Clinically-led Review of NHS Access Standards – November 2019

## Background

The NHS National Medical Director was asked by the Prime Minister in June 2018 to review the core set of access standards, to ensure that they support the ambition for the NHS that would be set out in the Long Term Plan, and measure what matters most to patients, and clinically.

The [interim report](#) of the review was published in March 2019, setting out proposals to test new access standards in mental health services, cancer care, elective care and urgent and emergency care, to see whether they can be used safely and improve patient experience and outcomes.

## What has happened since the review was published?

The NHS nationally has been working to identify and support local NHS organisations to test how the different proposals work in the real world.

A [progress update](#) was published on 31 October 2019, detailing progress made in testing these proposals locally, and what we have learnt so far.

We will continue to engage with partners and key stakeholders nationally, including through a Clinical Oversight Group and individual stakeholder advisory groups for each workstream made up of patient groups, national charities, and clinical representatives.

## Testing the urgent and emergency care standards

We are working with 14 hospitals across England to find out whether using a broader set of measures than the current four-hour threshold can better ensure those who need it get the right care fast, while reducing both unnecessary admissions to hospital and very long waits.

Initial results have been promising; the number of patients spending over 12 hours in A&E has fallen faster in trial sites than a control group, and there are signs that more people are getting the help they need to return home the same day.

We are also encouraged by research conducted on behalf of Healthwatch England, which found that the public place the highest priority on A&E teams providing early initial assessment on arrival for everyone, allowing staff to prioritise those patients with the greatest need, and ensuring that patients with critical conditions get the right standard of care quickly.

Further, they found that the current measure was not well recognised, and that more people would find an average wait time understandable and useful.

## Testing the elective (planned) care standards

12 hospital trusts are testing whether the use of an average (mean) wait between being referred by a GP and starting treatment for routine conditions can better achieve the goal of reducing long waits for care than the current threshold standard.

Initial modelling and analysis work with expert groups supported this hypothesis, and the initial feedback from trusts has assured us that it is possible to implement the measure effectively.

Again, we are encouraged by public polling, conducted for Healthwatch England, which suggests that moving to an average measure would be more meaningful for patients when exercising choice over where to receive treatment.

**NHS England and NHS Improvement**



### Testing the cancer diagnosis standards

From late August, 11 hospital trusts began to test the use of a faster diagnosis standard for people with suspected cancer.

This standard means that people can expect to be told whether or not they have cancer within 28 days of an urgent referral from their GP or a cancer screening programme, instead of the current standard of seeing a specialist, with no measurement of when someone should be told the result.

Initial testing has initially focused on establishing that it is possible safely to shift to the new standard, and no issues have been recorded.

Promisingly, sites are also reporting some early improvements, against a continuing backdrop of significant increases in the number of people who are being referred for urgent cancer checks.

### Testing the mental health standards

The proposed mental health standards – covering both urgent and emergency care in hospitals and the community – are being trialled in more than 30 parts of the country.

They represent a significant expansion of access standards in mental health – both over the last few years and in the future, as part of the Long Term Plan – and are designed to give more people who need mental health support an expectation of timely access.

Early signs suggest that they can be implemented safely and can support improvements in how care is delivered.

### Evaluation and next steps

As there have been positive initial results in each of the four service areas, testing will continue across all of them to determine to what extent the proposals are: an improvement on what we have now; measure what's most important clinically, and to patients, and; are clear and straightforward to understand.

The data that this provides will continue to be monitored and analysed, alongside learning from independent research on patient experience (led by Healthwatch England) and on how staff view the current and proposed standards (led by SQW).

All of this will help inform refined proposals, which will be subject to public consultation, which we would expect to launch in early 2020.

The results of that consultation, combined with further analysis and evaluation and continued input nationally from clinician and patient groups will inform a final report and set of recommendations by the end of March 2020.

All rights under the NHS Constitution remain in place for all patients during the course of testing, even if they are receiving care at one of the hospitals testing new standards. If recommendations require changes to the NHS Constitution, they will be subject to further consultation.

The approach to implementation of the proposals for each pathway will therefore be considered individually, to ensure that enough time and consideration is given to each, and to how they might affect or be affected by any proposals being considered as part of the ongoing review of access to general practice.

### Find out more

Information is regularly updated on the [NHS website](#), and you can get in touch with the review team at [england.reviewofstandards@nhs.net](mailto:england.reviewofstandards@nhs.net).

