

## **INTERVIEW BRIEFING**

### **Health Minister interviews on latest NHS performance data – Dec 2023 and January 2024**

<b>Date and time</b>	Thursday 22 <sup>nd</sup> February 2024
<b>Location</b>	The bandstand at Victoria Park, Cardiff
<b>Interviewer and format</b>	Redacted – Section 40, ITV Wales – 15 minutes in person
<b>Lead press officers</b>	Redacted – Section 40
<b>Background</b>	<p>The monthly NHS performance data will be published at 9:30am on Thursday 22nd February 2024.</p> <p>You will be responding to these.</p>
<b>Top Messages to get out</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• These figures cover the period of the year when our NHS and its heroic staff is under the most intense pressure.</li><li>• So I am delighted that the overall number of people on waiting lists has come down again, for the second month in a row. Those waiting more than two years for treatment also fell for the 21st consecutive month. I am pleased to see performance increased against the 62-day cancer target too. The number of people told they don't have cancer was also the highest figure on record for any December.</li><li>• The immense pressure on our health service continues. New referrals to secondary care facilities like hospitals are the highest on record, having increased 11 per cent in the latest year. Attendances at Emergency Departments were the highest for any January on record. The number of patients to receive a 'red' or most urgent ambulance response in eight minutes was the second highest on record in January.</li><li>• We have placed a clear focus on tackling both those patients with an urgent need and those that have waited the longest. These efforts are bearing fruit, as are our investments like the new urgent primary care centre</li></ul>

	<p>services. These are helping significantly more people than this time last year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We have today announced more than £14 million is being invested by the Welsh Government to extend and reconfigure parts of the Grange University Hospital emergency department.</li> </ul>
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### **Latest NHS performance data**

#### **Top lines to take:**

- These figures cover the period of the year when our NHS and its heroic staff is under the most intense pressure.
- So I am delighted that the overall number of people on waiting lists has come down again, for the second month in a row. Those waiting more than two years for treatment also fell for the 21<sup>st</sup> consecutive month.
- I am pleased to see performance increased against the 62-day cancer target too, from 53.5 per cent to 58 per cent in December. The number of people told they don't have cancer was also the highest figure on record for any December.
- We have placed a clear focus on tackling both those patients with an urgent need and those that have waited the longest.
- The immense pressure on our health service continues. New referrals to secondary care facilities like hospitals are the highest on record, having increased 11 per cent in the latest year. Attendances at Emergency Departments were the highest for any January on record.
- Despite this, performance increased against the four-hour target, while the average time spent in emergency departments decreased in January compared to the previous month.
- The number of patients to receive a 'red' or most urgent ambulance response in eight minutes was the second highest on record in January, with an average response time of 8 minutes and 11 seconds. And despite pressure on the system, the average response to 'amber' patients improved on December.

- The new urgent primary care centre services we have funded to help deliver care closer to home, and reduce pressure on GPs and emergency departments are helping significantly more people than this time last year. These centres are ensuring people receive the right care, in the right place, first time, with the vast majority avoiding the need to attend an emergency department following assessment.
- Progress continues to be made on Pathways of Care Delays, with significant reductions in the number of assessment related delays.
- I would again like to thank our dedicated NHS Wales staff. They have continued to provide a high quality service under extremely challenging circumstances this winter.

#### **Other lines to take:**

- It is disappointing to see one-year waits for a first outpatient appointment increase, and the number of waits of longer than eight weeks for diagnostic services rise. The overall number of waits for diagnostic services did fall however.
- While I recognise we have not achieved our original commitment to clear two-year waits across the majority of specialities, I am pleased that five of the health boards have achieved the interim milestone I gave them – for at least 97% of their pathways to be waiting under two years by the end of December. In fact, we were just 0.2% below the target being achieved nationally. Betsi still have challenges in a number of areas, and Swansea Bay just missed it.

#### **Winter pressures and planning**

- It is important to point out that despite the significant increase in demand for services at this time of the year– the NHS continues to perform well for the vast majority of patients.
- More people than ever before are employed by the NHS in Wales with more doctors, nurses, ambulance staff and support healthcare workers delivering quality care on a daily basis.
- Planning for winter starts from April to enable a collective, whole-system response.
- This year, £25m was allocated to support the six goals for urgent and emergency care improvement programme, enabling an increase in capacity in key parts of the system.
  - NHS 111 press 2 was rolled out across Wales, which is providing advice to more than 80,000 people each month, including around 525 people who need urgent mental healthcare.

- We have established 16 new primary care centres which are helping around 12,000 people a month to access care away from the emergency department.
- And we have set up 23 new same day emergency care services, diverting around 5,000 patients a month from hospital.
- It is a well-established policy ambition to support more people closer to home. £8.24m was made available to health boards and their regional partners to increase their ability to plan, monitor and provide enhanced community care for people with the most complex needs in our communities as a safe alternative to hospital admission.
- Vaccination is one of the safest and most effective ways of protecting our citizens and health service. I'm really pleased that 1.6 million influenza and COVID-19 vaccinations have been administered in Wales as part of the current programme.
- Primary care remains busy, but demand is in line with typical yearly patterns; with no escalation beyond the high levels we see at this time of year. Continuous monitoring is in place to support GP practices in delivering effective services during winter.

### **UPCCs**

- When comparing data for January 2023 (8,745 contacts) with January 2024 (13,010) there is **an increase of 49%** (4,265 contacts)

5,194 – virtual contacts (40%)

7,816 – face to face contact (60%)

- 10,278 (82%) patients were discharged with self-care and/or medication.
- With these new centres, we are helping thousands of people to access the right care, first time; every month.

### **General PoCD lines:**

- The winter season brings with it its own unique challenges for both the health and social care sectors. Particularly as they work together to support people who are leaving hospital. However this is the most pressurised time for our services.

- Although the January 2024 data has shown a slight increase from the December position, the total number of delays is still continuing the overall downward trend from the November 2023 position:

Total PoCD Reported Delays for past 3 months.

- Nov 23 – 1,567
- Dec 23 – 1,361
- Jan 24 – 1,548

- This is likely due to seasonal variation and a particularly successful December position. However the overall trend indicates that total delays are reducing.
- We're also seeing a reduction in the total numbers of days delayed, which tells us that health boards and social services are working to support those patients with the longest delays:

Total Days Delayed – last 3 months and April baseline

- Apr 23 – 42,998
- Nov 23 - 32,867
- Dec 23 - 32,682
- Jan 24 - 30,605

- Pathways of Care Delays have reduced from **April 23 at 1,750 to 1,548 in January 24, a reduction of 202 (11% reduction).**
- Assessment delays have reduced between **April 23 and Jan 24 from 855 to 658, a reduction of 197 (23% reduction)**
- Continuous improvement with month-to-month variations.

**More than £14m to improve emergency department at the Grange hospital:**

- We have today announced that more than £14 million is being invested by the Welsh Government to extend and reconfigure parts of the Grange University Hospital emergency department.
- The funding will improve the quality of patient and staff experience and ensure the right facilities are in place to consistently deliver safe and timely care to those who need to use the service.
- The Grange Hospital has seen unprecedented demand at its emergency department since its opening in November 2020, with the impact of Coronavirus contributing to this issue.
- Current attendances are around 263 patients per day on average. Original plans were for 100-170 attendances per day. This has resulted in overcrowding and uncomfortable conditions for patients and their relatives, and difficult working conditions for staff.

### **Other hot topics**

Redacted – not in scope for relating to misinformation, public messaging strategy, or reputational risk

**ENDS**