

Delivering the 18 week patient pathway

THE 18-WEEK RULES SUITE - MEASURING SUCCESS

1. The fundamental reason for '18 weeks' is for patients to feel the difference and to finally take waiting times 'off the table' as an issue for patients. The NHS cannot claim success in achieving 18 weeks if patients do not feel it was achieved for them. The primary measure of success will therefore be what patients tell us about their care and experience of elective care services.
2. The Department has been testing a patient survey, and are now embarking on a second round of piloting, which include the Early Achiever sites. The survey will focus on patient's level of satisfaction with their care from referral to treatment, and their overall satisfaction with the service they have received.
3. The measure of delivery for organisations that we will continue to judge progress against will be the monthly referral to treatment data for admitted and non-admitted patients. We will not be aggregating results for admitted and non-admitted patients, so success has to be achieved for each patient group separately. The waits for admitted patients will now take into account delays introduced because patients turn down offers of admissions made with reasonable notice. We are working with the NHS to introduce this approach, so that progress from March 2008 onwards can be judged on this basis.
4. The likely tolerances for December 2008, to take into account other patient initiated delays and clinical exceptions, are 10% for admitted patients and 5% for non-admitted patients, making the operational standards 90% and 95% respectively. These will be confirmed in the Operating Framework.

March 2008 Milestones and Standards

5. While the 18 weeks target is for achievement by December 2008, a number of milestones and standards are in place for achievement by NHS organisations during 2007/08. These were set out in the *NHS operating framework 2007/08* (December 2006) and in *Tackling hospital waiting: the 18 week pathway* (May 2006). March 2008 performance will be judged against the following milestones and standards:
 - 85% of admitted patients to start their treatment within 18 weeks of referral (with sufficient data completeness to make the result valid)
 - 90% of non-admitted patients to start their treatment within 18 weeks of referral (with sufficient data completeness to make the result valid)
 - Maximum in-patient stage of treatment wait of 26 weeks (at the end of each month in 2007/08)
 - Maximum out-patient stage of treatment wait of 13 weeks (at the end of each month in 2007/08)
 - Maximum diagnostic stage of treatment waits of 6 weeks.
6. We expect that these measures will be reflected in the Health Care Commission indicators.
7. NHS organisations will not be held to account by the Department for performance against the March 2008 in-patient milestone of 11 weeks or the out-patient milestone of 5 weeks.