

NHS Referral to Treatment Waiting Times

December 2014

Introduction

This briefing provides information on the performance of Local Health Boards (LHBs) against the Welsh Government targets for NHS treatment waiting times. Most NHS waiting times in Wales are measured against the time from referral to treatment (RTT), although there are a number of exceptions.¹ **The RTT is the period of time from referral, by a GP or other medical practitioner, to hospital for treatment.**²

The current Welsh Government targets for NHS RTT waiting times are to ensure that:

- At least 95 per cent of patients waiting to start treatment must have waited less than 26 weeks from referral to treatment
- 100 per cent of patients not treated within 26 weeks must be treated in 36 weeks.

The Welsh Government measures progress against these targets each month, and the figures used **are those for patients waiting to start treatment at the end of the month**. Separate figures for patients treated during each month are published,³ but as these are not covered by the targets they have not

¹ The targets apply to the majority of referrals to NHS hospitals for treatment; however there are a number of exceptions. In addition, some conditions such as cancer have their own specific target, and are therefore not included in the general targets. Further information on referral to treatment targets is available at: Welsh Government, [Referral to Treatment Times – April 2012](#), page 4, 14 June 2012 [accessed 11 December 2014]

² Welsh Government, [Referral to Treatment Times, October 2014](#), 11 December 2014 [accessed 11 December 2014]

³ *ibid*

been included in this release. The LHB figures included in this release are for patients treated by each LHB rather than the LHB they live in.

On 13 March 2014 the Minister for Health and Social Services, Mark Drakeford, announced new funding of £5 million to go towards cutting waits for diagnostic tests.⁴ The Minister stated that improving speed of access to these tests will mean that patients can start their full treatment more quickly, meaning that overall waiting times should reduce.

NHS Referral to Treatment Waiting Times in October 2014

Table 1 and figures 1 and 2 show performance against the 26 and 36 week referral to treatment waiting time targets for each LHB, and for the whole of Wales, using the latest figures from October 2014.⁵ It can be seen from table 1 and figure 1 that:

- In **October 2014**, neither the 26 week nor 36 week targets were met on an All Wales basis.
- **Powys Teaching Health Board** achieved both the 26 week and the 36 week referral to treatment waiting time target in October 2014.
- **Cardiff and Vale University Health Board** was the worst performing LHB for both the 26 week target and the 36 week target.

⁴ Welsh Government, [New funding to speed up access to treatment](#), 13 March 2014 [accessed 11 December 2014]

⁵ Welsh Government, [Referral to Treatment Times, October 2014](#), 11 December 2014 [accessed 11 December 2014]



Table 1: Performance against waiting time targets at end of October 2014 (a), (c),

Local Health Board	Under 26 weeks		Under 36 weeks (b)		Over 36 weeks	Total patients waiting for treatment
	Number of patients waiting	Percentage of all patients waiting	Number of patients waiting	Percentage of all patients waiting	Number of patients waiting	
Abertawe Bro Morgannwg	70,792	86.6	77,937	95.3	3,813	81,750
Aneurin Bevan	69,029	87.6	75,770	96.2	2,986	78,756
Betsi Cadwaladr	74,500	86.1	81,863	94.6	4,683	86,546
Cardiff and Vale	69,801	83.3	79,116	94.4	4,699	83,815
Cwm Taf	34,621	86.3	38,512	96.0	1,623	40,135
Hywel Dda	48,044	86.9	53,323	96.4	1,981	55,304
Powys	5,173	99.5	5,197	100.0	.	5,197
Wales	371,960	86.2	411,718	95.4	19,785	431,503

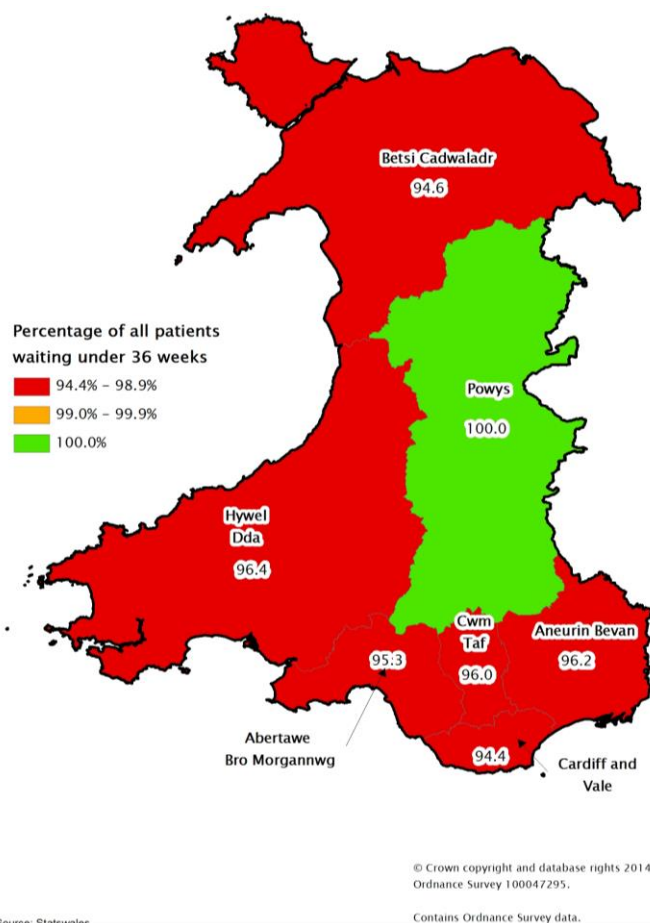
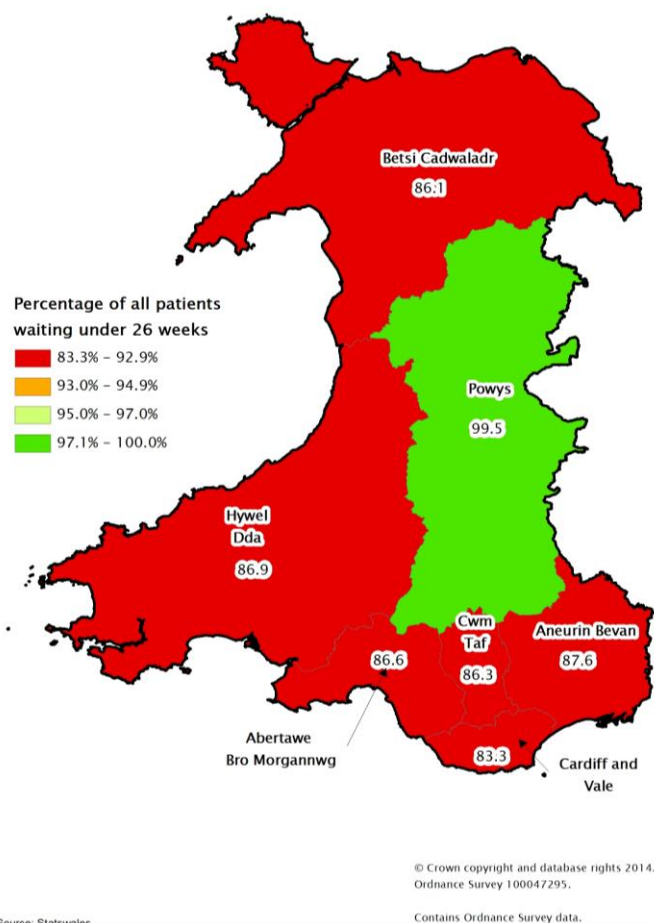
Source: Research Service calculations from Stats Wales, **Patients waiting to start treatment by latest month, local health board and weeks waiting**,

Notes:

- (a) This includes patients who are waiting for cardiac treatment. Cardiac RTT is defined differently from the rest of RTT; please refer to the **Referral to Treatment Time quality report** for further details.
- (b) The figures for patients waiting under 36 weeks for treatment include those waiting under 26 weeks and between 26 and 36 weeks for treatment.
- (c) The values in the purple shaded boxes met the referral to treatment waiting time target in October 2014.

Figure 1: Percentage of patients waiting less than 26 weeks for treatment at end of October 2014

Figure 2: Percentage of patients waiting less than 36 weeks for treatment at end of October 2014



Performance against RTT waiting time targets since October 2013

Table 2 and figure 3 focus on the performance against the referral to treatment waiting time targets, on an All Wales basis since October 2013.⁶

It can be seen from table 2 and figure 3 that:

- **Neither target has been met in any month** at an All Wales level between October 2013 and October 2014.
- The percentage of patients waiting less than 26 weeks for treatment in October 2014 was 0.5 percentage points higher than in September 2014, and the third lowest of any point over the past year.
- The percentage of patients waiting less than 36 weeks for treatment in October 2014 was 0.3 percentage points lower than in September 2014, and the joint lowest of any point over the past year.
- The number of patients waiting over 36 weeks for treatment was 7,500 more than in October 2013, and nearly 1,000 more than in September 2014.
- Over 15,000 more people were waiting for treatment at the end of October 2014 compared to October 2013. The number of patients waiting for treatment at the end of October 2014 is the fifth highest of any point over the past year, and also since figures started to be produced in the current format in September 2011.⁷

Table 2: Performance against waiting time targets, on All Wales basis, October 2013 to October 2014 (a), (b)

Date	Under 26 weeks		Under 36 weeks (b)		Over 36 weeks	Total patients waiting for treatment
	Number of patients waiting	Percentage of all patients waiting	Number of patients waiting	Percentage of all patients waiting	Number of patients waiting	
October 2013	366,875	88.2	403,742	97.0	12,281	416,023
November 2013	364,999	88.0	401,502	96.8	13,269	414,771
December 2013	360,170	86.6	401,045	96.5	14,745	415,790
January 2014	357,719	86.8	396,043	96.1	16,109	412,152
February 2014	364,004	87.9	398,675	96.3	15,388	414,063
March 2014	371,877	88.9	407,856	97.5	10,586	418,442
April 2014	371,744	87.7	411,214	97.0	12,795	424,009
May 2014	371,205	86.3	414,864	96.4	15,498	430,362
June 2014	379,870	87.3	418,716	96.2	16,400	435,116
July 2014	378,301	87.2	416,090	95.9	17,649	433,739
August 2014	377,013	86.0	418,440	95.4	20,151	438,591
September 2014	371,137	85.7	414,059	95.7	18,810	432,869
October 2014	371,960	86.2	411,718	95.4	19,785	431,503

Source: Research Service calculations from Stats Wales, [Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#)

Notes:

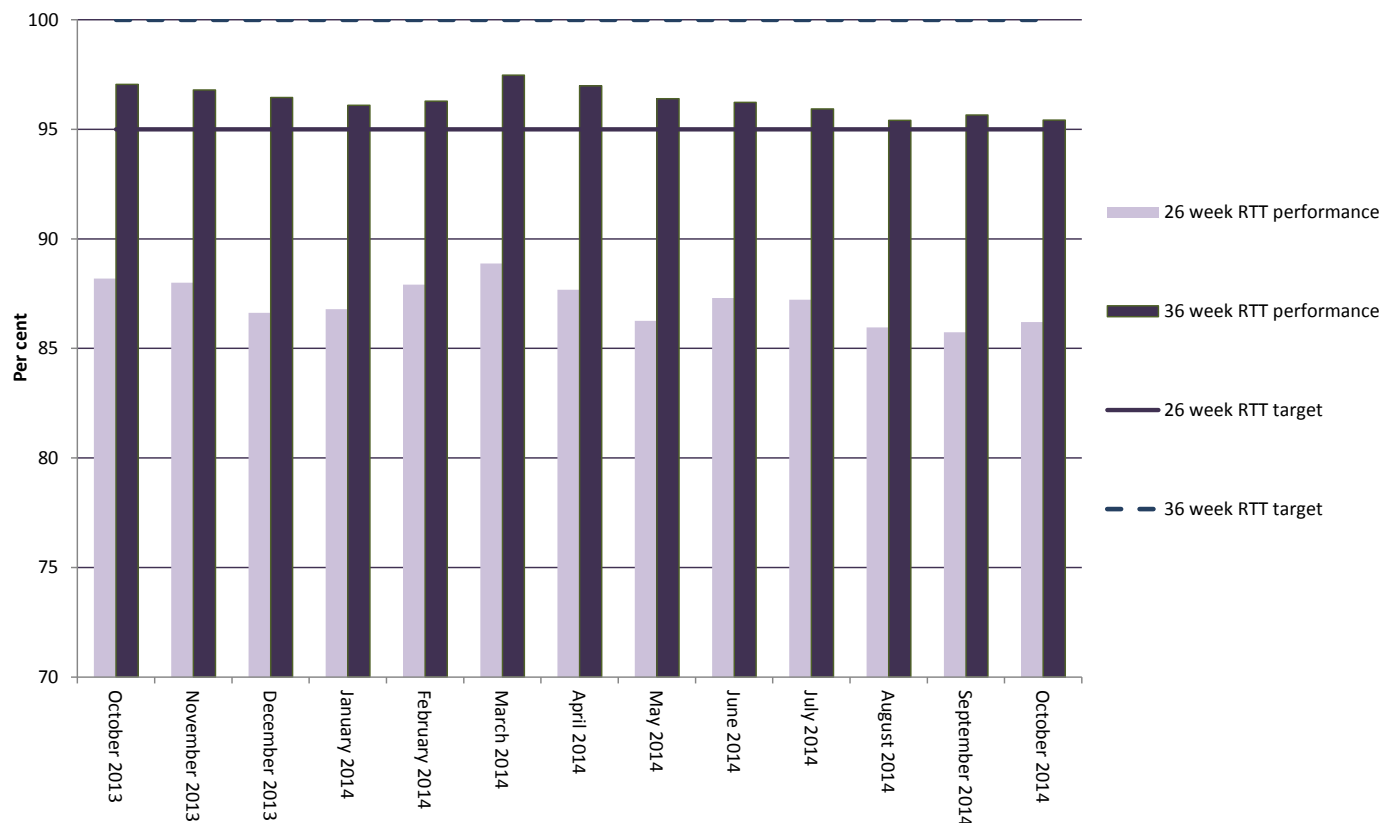
- This includes patients who are waiting for cardiac treatment. Cardiac RTT is defined differently from the rest of RTT; please refer to the [Referral to treatment time quality report](#) for further details.
- The figures for patients waiting under 36 weeks for treatment include those waiting under 26 weeks and between 26 and 36 weeks for treatment.

⁶ Welsh Government, Stats Wales, [Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#) [accessed 11 December 2014]

⁷ Ibid



Figure 3: Percentage of patients waiting less than 26 and 36 weeks at end of month from October 2013 to October 2014



Source: Research Service calculations from Stats Wales, **Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks**

Notes – See notes from Table 2

Trauma and orthopaedic specialty

While **waiting time targets are allied to performance across all specialties**, it is useful to see the contribution of individual specialties towards performance. In a written statement in March 2011, the then Minister for Health and Social Services highlighted the difficulty in achieving waiting time targets due to pressures within orthopaedic services resulting from increased GP referrals.⁸

⁸ Welsh Government, Edwina Hart (Minister for Health and Social Services), **Waiting Times and Orthopaedic Services update**, Cabinet Written Statement, 10 March 2011 [accessed 11 December 2014]

Following additional funding allocations for orthopaedic treatment in 2011-12 and 2012-13, the Welsh Government stated that £16.6 million will be allocated in recurrent annual funding from 2013-14 with the purpose of sustaining improvements in orthopaedic waiting times.⁹

⁹ Welsh Government, **Draft Budget 2013-14: A Budget for Growth and Jobs**, page 38, October 2012 [accessed 11 December 2014]



Table 3 shows the latest figures for the trauma and orthopaedic specialty, at the end of October 2014.

Table 3: Waiting times for trauma and orthopaedic specialty at end of October 2014, (a), (b)

Local Health Board	Under 26 weeks		Under 36 weeks (a)		Total patients waiting for treatment
	Number of patients waiting	Percentage of patients waiting	Number of patients waiting	Percentage of all patients waiting	
Abertawe Bro Morgannwg	8,091	75.7	9,443	88.3	10,693
Aneurin Bevan	11,148	77.9	12,744	89.0	14,315
Betsi Cadwaladr	8,462	69.4	10,313	84.6	12,189
Cardiff and Vale	8,232	85.0	9,432	97.4	9,681
Cwm Taf	4,238	88.1	4,700	97.7	4,809
Hywel Dda	6,168	77.8	7,190	90.7	7,923
Powys	511	99.8	512	100.0	512
Wales	46,850	77.9	54,334	90.4	60,122

Source: Research Service calculations from Stats Wales **Patients waiting to start treatment by latest month, local health board and weeks waiting**

Notes:

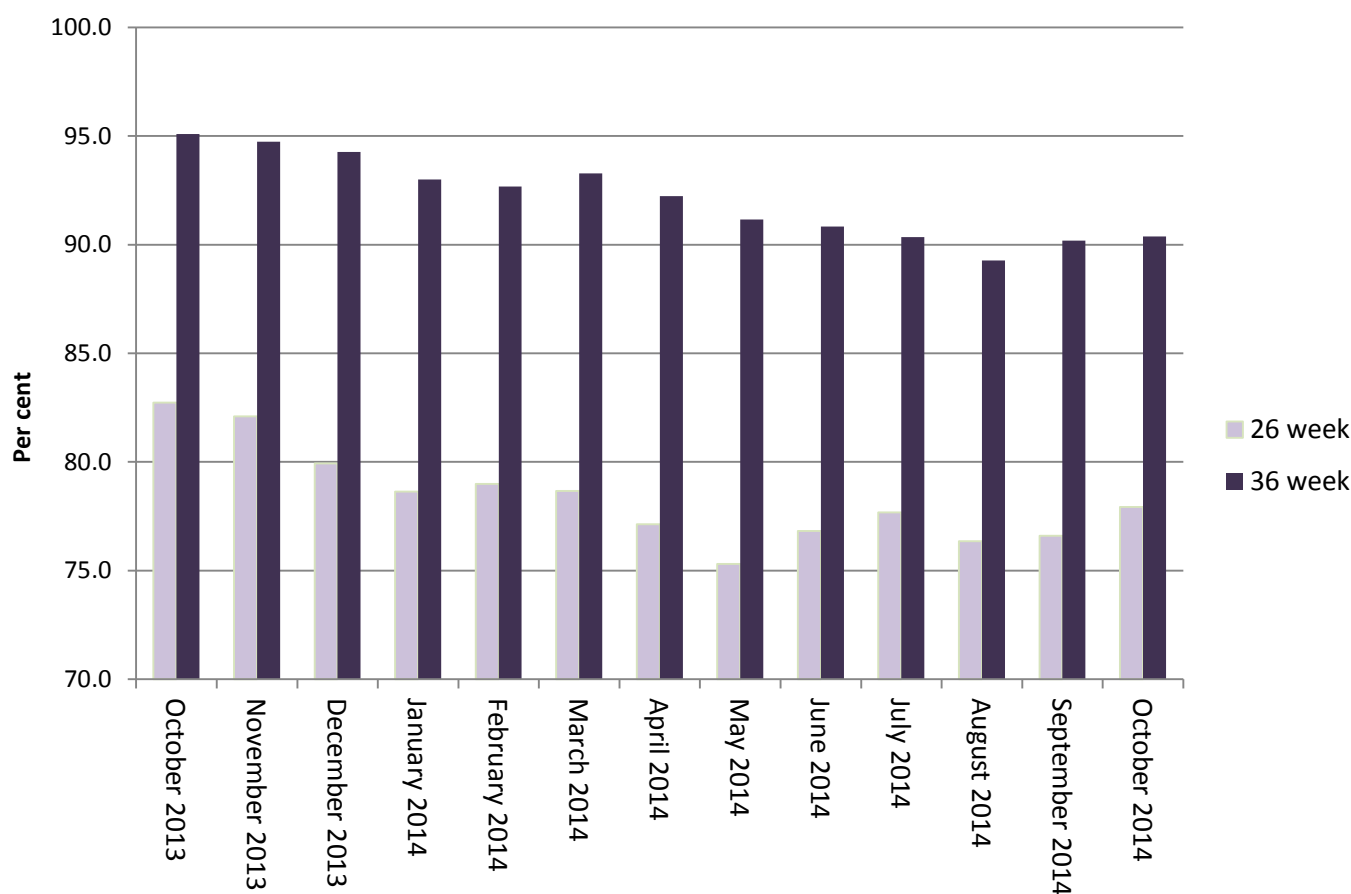
- (a) The figures for patients waiting under 36 weeks for treatment include those waiting under 26 weeks and between 26 and 36 weeks for treatment.
- (b) Values in the purple shaded boxes indicate a level of performance in October 2014 equal to or above that needed to achieve the waiting time targets.

In October 2014, it can be seen that:

- **In Powys Teaching Health Board** over 95 per cent of patients were waiting less than 26 weeks. In all other LHBs, less than 89 per cent of patients had been waiting less than 26 weeks for treatment.
- **In Powys Teaching Health Board**, all patients had been waiting under 36 weeks for treatment. In all other LHBs, less than 98 per cent of patients had been waiting less than 36 weeks for treatment.
- The LHB with the lowest percentage of patients waiting under 26 and 36 weeks was **Betsi Cadwaladr Health Board**.

Figure 4 compares the percentage of patients waiting less than 26 and 36 weeks for treatment in the trauma and orthopaedic specialty in the months from October 2013 to October 2014.

Figure 4: Percentage of patients waiting less than 26 and 36 weeks in the trauma and orthopaedic specialty, from October 2013 to October 2014



Source: Research Service calculations from Stats Wales, [Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#)

- For each month since October 2013, the percentage of patients waiting under 26 weeks has been **well below the level needed to achieve the waiting time target across all specialties**. The percentage of patients waiting less than 26 weeks in the trauma and orthopaedic specialty in October 2014 was 1.3 percentage points higher than September 2014. ¹⁰
- For each month since October 2013, the percentage of patients waiting under 36 weeks has also been **below the level needed to achieve the waiting time target across all specialties**. The percentage of patients waiting less than 36 weeks in the trauma and orthopaedic specialty in October 2014 was the fourth lowest of any point over the past year, and since figures started to be produced in the current format in September 2011. It increased by 0.2 percentage points compared to September 2014.

¹⁰ Welsh Government, Stats Wales, [Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#) [accessed 11 December 2014]



Further information

The links below provide further information about the data sources used in this briefing, and further information about NHS Referral to Treatment Waiting Times:

- Welsh Government, **Referral to Treatment Times, October 2014**
- Stats Wales, **Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks**
- Stats Wales, **Patients waiting to start treatment by latest month, local health board and weeks waiting**
- Statistics on patients that have been treated during each month are available at:
 - Stats Wales, **Treated patients by month and grouped weeks**

For further information and statistics on NHS Referral to Treatment Waiting Times, please contact **Nigel Barwise** (Nigel.Barwise@Assembly.Wales), **Research Service**.

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