

NHS Referral to Treatment Waiting Times

November 2015

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.**

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, [Waiting Times for NHS Services: Frequently Asked Questions](#), 9 June 2011 [accessed 12 November 2015]

² Welsh Government, [Referral to Treatment Times, September 2015](#), 12 November 2015 [accessed 12 November 2015]

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 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.

From December 2015 the Welsh Government will publish this data on StatsWales with summary headline statistics published on the Statistics & Research pages. A new quarterly series of first releases, with more detailed analysis and commentary, will be published from 10 March 2016. The Research Service will continue to publish this research note every month.

NHS Referral to Treatment Waiting Times in September 2015

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 September 2015.⁴ It can be seen from table 1 and figures 1 and 2 that:

- In September 2015, 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 September 2015.
- **Hywel Dda Health Board** was the worst performing LHB for both the 26 week target and the 36 week target.

³ *ibid*

⁴ *ibid*



Table 1: Performance against waiting time targets at end of September 2015 (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	66,510	85.3	72,975	93.6	5,021	77,996
Aneurin Bevan	70,517	84.7	79,664	95.7	3,589	83,253
Betsi Cadwaladr	73,854	84.9	82,097	94.4	4,857	86,954
Cardiff and Vale	72,272	84.7	83,102	97.4	2,180	85,282
Cwm Taf	35,044	81.7	40,269	93.8	2,645	42,914
Hywel Dda	47,224	77.6	54,161	89.0	6,721	60,882
Powys	5,403	99.9	5,409	100.0	.	5,409
Wales	370,824	83.8	417,677	94.3	25,013	442,690

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 September 2015.

Figure 1: Percentage of patients waiting less than 26 weeks for treatment at end of September 2015

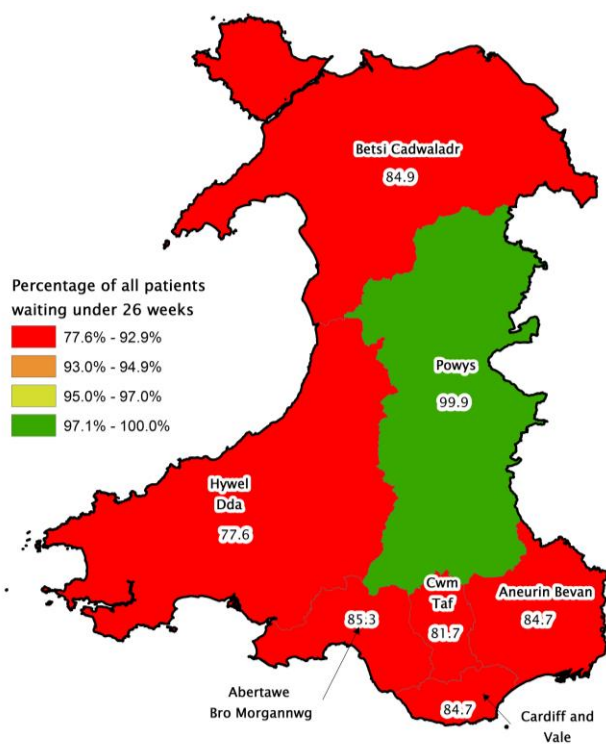
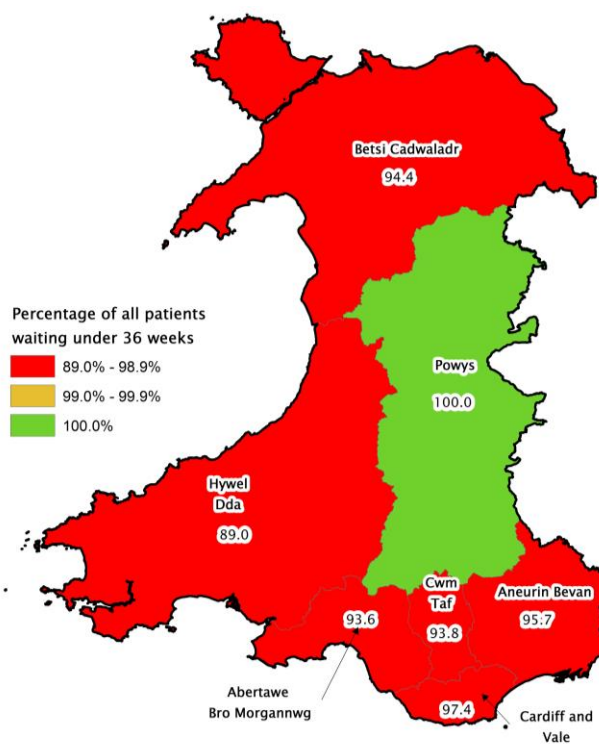


Figure 2: Percentage of patients waiting less than 36 weeks for treatment at end of September 2015



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Source: Statswales

Contains Ordnance Survey data.

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Performance against RTT waiting time targets since September 2014

Table 2 and figure 3 focus on the performance against the referral to treatment waiting time targets, on an All Wales basis since September 2014.⁵

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 September 2014 and September 2015.
- The percentage of patients waiting less than 26 weeks for treatment in September 2015 was 0.5 percentage points lower than in August, the joint lowest since figures started to be produced in the current format in September 2011.
- The percentage of patients waiting less than 36 weeks for treatment in September 2015 was 0.7 percentage points higher than in August, the joint fifth lowest since figures started to be produced in the current format in September 2011.
- The number of patients waiting over 36 weeks for treatment was 6,000 more than in September 2014. It was the fifth highest since figures started to be produced in the current format in September 2011.
- The number of people waiting for treatment at the end of September 2015 was over 9,500 more than in September 2014.⁶ It was the third highest since figures started to be produced in the current format in September 2011.

Table 2: Performance against waiting time targets, on All Wales basis, September 2014 to September 2015 (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	
September 2014	371,184	85.7	414,110	95.7	18,810	432,920
October 2014	372,006	86.2	411,771	95.4	19,785	431,556
November 2014	365,688	86.3	403,869	95.4	19,679	423,548
December 2014	357,883	85.1	399,303	95.0	21,230	420,533
January 2015	349,703	84.3	391,142	94.3	23,532	414,674
February 2015	354,687	85.3	392,499	94.4	23,238	415,737
March 2015	360,496	86.2	399,444	95.5	18,938	418,382
April 2015	364,092	84.9	406,166	94.7	22,753	428,919
May 2015	364,338	83.8	409,501	94.1	25,519	435,020
June 2015	372,810	84.8	414,256	94.2	25,373	439,629
July 2015	377,531	85.1	416,531	93.8	27,313	443,844
August 2015	374,689	84.3	416,013	93.6	28,654	444,667
September 2015	370,824	83.8	417,677	94.3	25,013	442,690

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

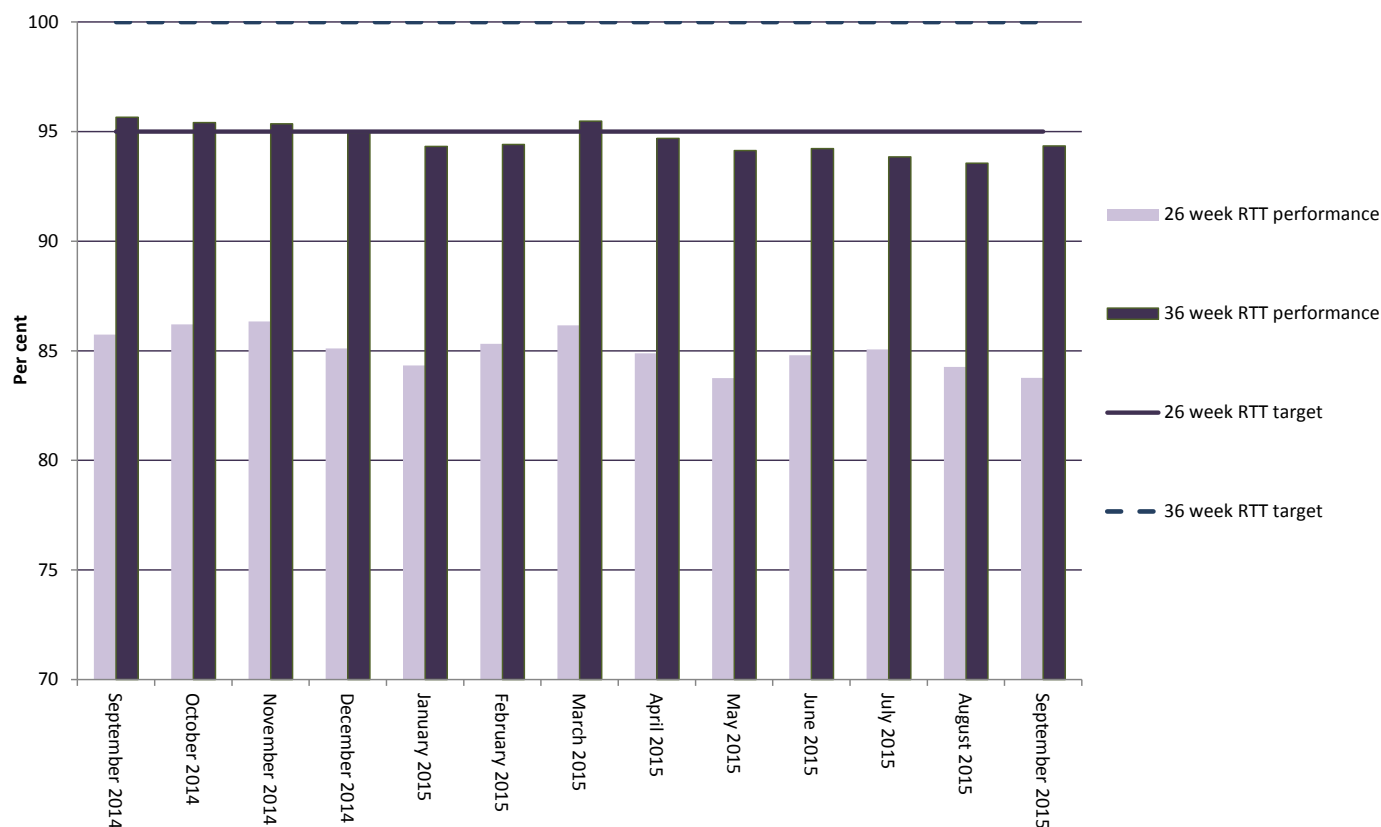
Notes:

- (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.

⁵ Welsh Government, Stats Wales, **Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks** [accessed 12 November 2015]

⁶ Ibid

Figure 3: Percentage of patients waiting less than 26 and 36 weeks at end of month from September 2014 to September 2015



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 speciality

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.⁷

Following additional funding allocations for orthopaedic treatment in 2011-12 and 2012-13, the

⁷ Welsh Government, Edwina Hart (Minister for Health and Social Services), [Waiting Times and Orthopaedic Services update](#), Cabinet Written Statement, 10 March 2011 [accessed 12 November 2015]

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.⁸

In his report published in June 2015, [A Review of Orthopaedic Services](#), the Auditor General for Wales concluded that while orthopaedic services have become more efficient in the past decade, NHS Wales is not well placed to meet future demand. This is because there has been a focus on securing immediate reductions in waiting times, however less attention has been paid to developing more sustainable, long-term solutions to meet demand.

⁸ Welsh Government, [Draft Budget 2013-14: A Budget for Growth and Jobs](#), page 38, October 2012 [accessed 12 November 2015]



Table 3 shows the latest figures for the trauma and orthopaedic specialty, at the end of September 2015.

Table 3: Waiting times for trauma and orthopaedic specialty at end of September 2015, (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	7,565	70.2	8,963	83.1	10,783
Aneurin Bevan	11,211	74.7	13,234	88.2	14,998
Betsi Cadwaladr	9,511	68.2	11,651	83.5	13,952
Cardiff and Vale	8,626	79.6	10,336	95.4	10,837
Cwm Taf	3,995	77.9	4,784	93.3	5,127
Hywel Dda	5,503	70.2	6,562	83.7	7,838
Powys	392	99.7	393	100.0	393
Wales	46,803	73.2	55,923	87.5	63,928

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

Notes:

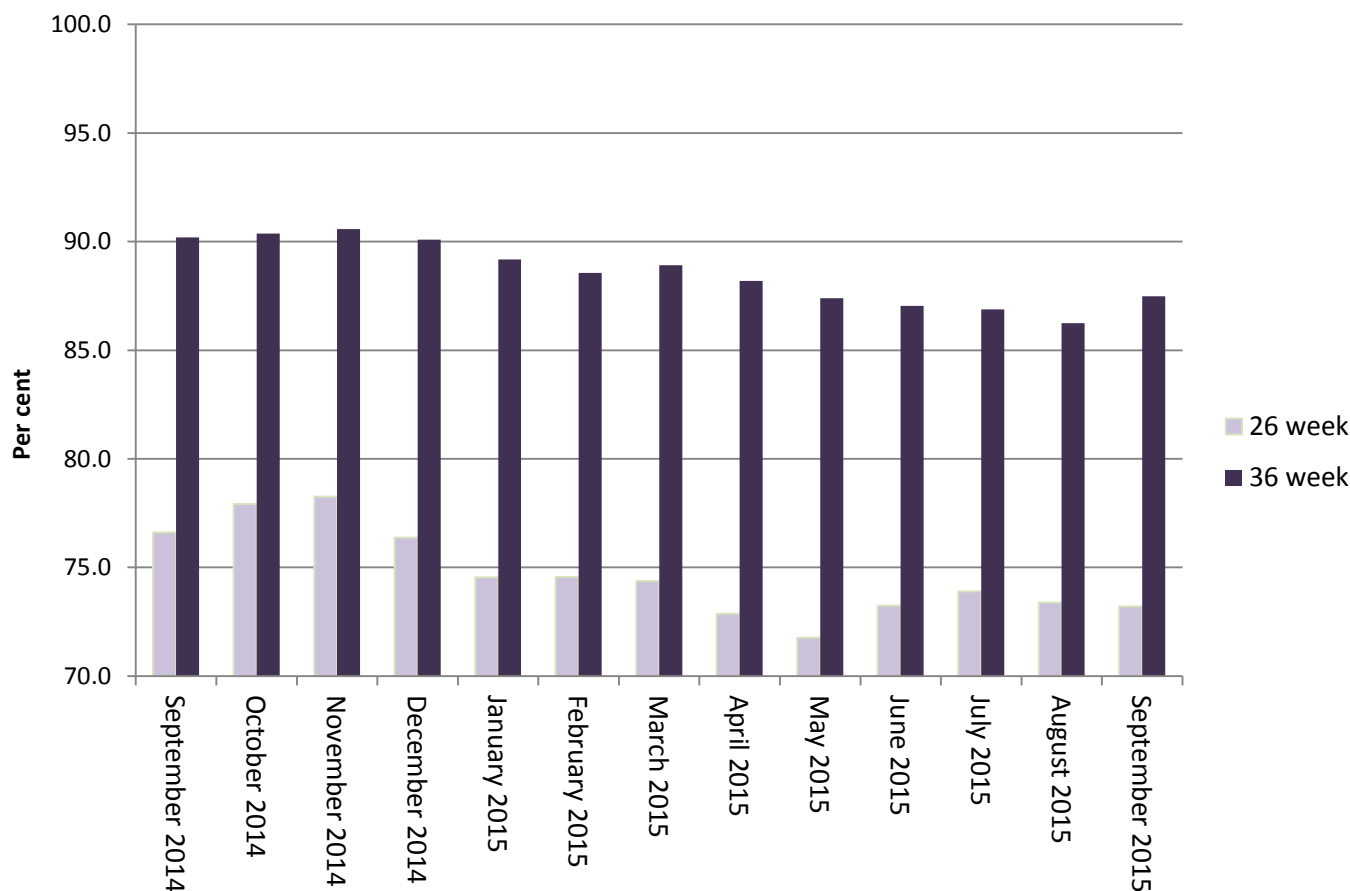
- (a) The figures for patients waiting under 36 weeks for treatment include those waiting under 26 weeks and between 26 and 36 weeks for treatment.
- (b) Values in the purple shaded boxes indicate a level of performance in September 2015 equal to or above that needed to achieve the waiting time targets.

In September 2015, it can be seen that:

- **In Powys Teaching Health Board** almost all patients had been waiting less than 26 weeks. In all other LHBs, less than 80 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 96 per cent of patients had been waiting less than 36 weeks for treatment.
- The LHB with the lowest percentage of patients waiting under 26 weeks was **Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board**.
- The LHB with the lowest percentage of patients waiting under 36 weeks was **Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University 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 September 2014 to September 2015.

Figure 4: Percentage of patients waiting less than 26 and 36 weeks in the trauma and orthopaedic specialty, from September 2014 to September 2015



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

- For each month since September 2014, 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 September 2015 decreased by 0.2 percentage points compared to August. This was the joint third lowest of any point over the past year, and since figures started to be produced in the current format in September 2011.⁹
- For each month since September 2014, 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 September 2015 was the fifth 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 1.3 percentage points compared to August.

⁹ Welsh Government, Stats Wales, [Patients waiting to start treatment by month and grouped weeks](#) [accessed 12 November 2015]



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, September 2015**
- 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**
- Auditor General for Wales, **NHS Waiting Times for Elective Care in Wales**, January 2015
- Auditor General for Wales, **A Review of Orthopaedic Services**, June 2015

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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