Chronic Pain Waiting Times
Quarter Ending 30 June 2020

An Official Statistics release for Scotland (Experimental)

Publication date: 8 September 2020

About this release
This release by Public Health Scotland reports on the length of time new patients waited for a first appointment at chronic pain and pain psychology clinics. These clinics are part of a service (usually with consultant or psychologist led outpatient appointments) to which an individual is referred for chronic pain assessment and management.

The data presented in this release have been impacted by measures put in place to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The majority of chronic pain services were temporarily paused from March 2020 as clinicians were redeployed to other roles. Chronic pain services started to resume in June 2020 as part of the planned remobilisation of services.

The release of this publication scheduled for June 2020, reporting on data to 31 March 2020 was cancelled due to national reporting pressures relating to the COVID-19 pandemic. This release therefore includes data for quarters ending March and June 2020.

Boards have experienced significant pressure on local resource as the response to the COVID-19 pandemic evolves. As a result, NHS Grampian were unable to provide data for quarter ending March 2020 and NHS Fife were unable to provide data for quarters ending March and June 2020.

Main Points

Chronic Pain Clinics
All NHS Boards offer pain clinics and submit data on how long patients wait to attend their first appointment. The data comparisons below do not include NHS Fife as they were unable to submit data for the quarter ending June 2020.

- In the quarter ending 30 June 2020, 1,501 new patients were referred to a Chronic Pain clinic. This compares to 4,972 in the same quarter in 2019, a reduction of 69.8%.
- In the same quarter, 547 patients were seen at a Chronic Pain clinic. This compares to 2,741 in the same quarter in 2019, a reduction of 80%.
- At the end of the quarter, 4,030 patients were waiting to be seen for their first appointment. This compares to 4,719 at end of June 2019 and 4,574 at end of December 2019, reductions of 14.6% and 11.9% respectively. Although the Scotland total has decreased, there is variation among Boards with some seeing an increase in patients waiting.
- Board data submissions show that patients are removed from a waiting list for reasons other than being seen with this continuing in quarters ending March and June 2020. This combined with less referrals being received has contributed to the fall in the number of patients waiting to be seen. Boards have reported that clinical triage/advice to patients is one of the main reasons they are no longer on the waiting list.
- The length of wait experienced by those waiting for a first appointment has changed. At end of June 2020, 52.9% of patients had been waiting more than 18 weeks. This compares to 15.4% at end of June 2019 and 23% at end of December 2019.
Pain Psychology Clinics

Ten NHS Boards provide Pain Psychology Clinics, 7 of which provide data for this publication (4 Boards submit the full dataset and 3 Boards submit a partial dataset). The data comparisons below do not include NHS Fife as were unable to submit data for the quarter ending June 2020.

- In the quarter ending 30 June 2020, 239 new patients were referred to a pain psychology clinic. This compares to 442 in the same quarter in 2019, a decrease of 45.9%.
- In the same quarter, 437 patients were seen at a pain psychology clinic. This compares to 295 patients seen in the same quarter in 2019, an increase of 32.5%. Almost all of these patients were seen in NHS Lothian who offered patients telephone or video appointments.
- At the end of the quarter, 178 patients were waiting to be seen for their first appointment. This compares to 389 at end of June 2019 and 588 at end of December 2019, reductions of 54.2% and 69.7% respectively. This change is because less referrals were received across all Boards and there was an increase in the number of patients seen in NHS Lothian.

Background

Chronic pain is pain that carries on for longer than 12 weeks despite medication or treatment. Further information can be found on the Scottish Access Collaborative website.

The data presented here have been adjusted for periods of patient unavailability.

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Further Information

Data from this publication are available from the publication page on our website.

The next release of this publication will be 8 December 2020.

NHS Performs

A selection of information from this publication is included in NHS Performs. NHS Performs is a website that brings together a range of information on how hospitals and NHS Boards within NHSScotland are performing.

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