

MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

Hospital Quarterly: Performance of NSW public hospitals October to December 2011

Emergency Departments, October to December 2011

More than half a million patients attended NSW public hospital emergency departments (EDs) from October to December 2011. This is 1% more than a year ago. The greatest increases were for patients in the more urgent triage categories.

Almost half of all emergency attendances (44%) were for patients in the potentially serious (triage 4) category; 32% were in the potentially life threatening category (triage 3), 14% in the lowest urgency category (triage 5) and 9% in the imminently life threatening category (triage 2).

Patients in the immediately life threatening category (triage 1) accounted for less than 1% of all ED patients.

page 4

Arrivals by Ambulance

From October to December 2011 there were 132,661 arrivals by ambulance to NSW public hospital emergency departments. This is a 4% increase since a year ago.

For patients arriving by ambulance, 65% were transferred into the care of emergency department staff within 30 minutes. This compares with 66% a year ago and 72% two years ago.

page 5 figure 3

ED presentation to treatment

At a state level, we report the times that 50% and 95% of ED patients are treated within for triage categories 2 to 5.

- The Bureau does not report time to treatment for triage 1 patients (e.g. critical injury, cardiac arrest) as this category is extremely time sensitive, representing a 2 minute window to begin treatment.
- Triage 2 – imminently life threatening (e.g. chest pain, severe burns). Half (50%) of triage 2 patients began treatment within 8 minutes and most (95%) began treatment within 36 minutes.
- Triage 3 – potentially life threatening (e.g. moderate blood loss, dehydration). Half (50%) of triage 3 patients began treatment within 23 minutes and most (95%) began treatment within 125 minutes.
- Triage 4 – potentially serious (e.g. minor head injury). Half (50%) of triage 4 patients began treatment within 33 minutes and most (95%) began treatment within 176 minutes.
- Triage 5 – less urgent (e.g. small cuts or abrasions). Half (50%) of triage 5 patients began treatment within 30 minutes and most (95%) began treatment within 174 minutes.

page 6 figure 4

MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

At a state level, the time from presentation until treatment begins fluctuates between quarters. Tables showing time to treatment over a five year period are on pages 12 to 13.

There is variation between hospitals when comparing time from presentation until treatment by triage category. Following are examples of the ranges of results from October to December 2011 for larger hospitals using one of the two predominant information systems:

- Half (50%) of all triage 2 patients start treatment within five minutes at Orange Hospital, compared with within 12 minutes at Fairfield Hospital.
- Most (95%) triage 2 patients start treatment within 17 minutes at Concord Hospital, compared with within 62 minutes at Nepean Hospital.
- Half (50%) of all triage 4 patients start treatment within 23 minutes at Wagga Wagga Base Hospital, compared with within 49 minutes at Tamworth Hospital.
- Most (95%) triage 4 patients start treatment within 115 minutes at Sutherland Hospital, compared with within 248 minutes at Westmead Hospital.

page 15

When an admitted patient leaves the ED

Throughout the report we refer to “admitted patients leaving the ED”. Generally, admitted patients are transferred to a ward, ICU or operating theatre in the same hospital.

The number of emergency admissions has been increasing. Between October and December 2011, there were 144,478 emergency admissions. This is 4% higher than the same quarter one year ago (138,421) and 6% higher than the same quarter two years ago (135,924).

For these patients, half (50%) leave the ED within 6 hours and 35 minutes and most (95%) within 19 hours and 34 minutes.

pages 8 & 9, figures 6 & 7

How to interpret 50% and 95%

Reporting on the times that 50% and 95% of patients are treated within or left the ED to be admitted to the same hospital is a common international approach to measuring wait times. *Hospital Quarterly* now includes information that shows the measurements used in our reports.

pages 16 & 17

Half (50% or the median) – the time by which half of patients started treatment, or left the ED to be admitted to another part of the hospital.

For example: if half of patients were seen within 23 minutes, this means 50% of patients started treatment between 0 and 23 minutes after arriving at the ED. The other 50% of patients waited 23 minutes or longer for treatment.

Most (or 95%) – the time by which 95% of patients started treatment, or left the ED to be admitted to another part of the hospital.

For example: if 95% of patients were seen within 125 minutes, most patients started treatment between 0 and 125 minutes after arriving at the ED. The final 5% of patients (or 1 in 20) waited 125 minutes or longer to start treatment.

MEDIA BACKGROUNDER

Elective Surgery, October to December 2011

During this quarter, 51,432 elective surgery procedures were completed in NSW public hospitals or in facilities contracted by NSW public hospitals.

This is 7% lower than the 55,398 surgical procedures completed from July to September 2011 (previous quarter) and 1% more than the 50,810 surgical procedures completed from October to December 2010 (same quarter, one year ago). *page 3*

From October to December 2011, 92% of all elective surgery patients were admitted within the recommended time for the urgency of their care. For urgent surgery 94% of patients were admitted within the recommended 30 days, 91% of semi-urgent patients were admitted within 90 days and 91% of non-urgent patients were admitted within 365 days. *page 5*

The median waits for urgent and semi-urgent surgery were stable. The median wait time for non-urgent surgery was 211 days, six days more than the same quarter in 2010. *page 6 figure 4*

Admitted Patients, October to December 2011

There were 421,033 admitted patient episodes from October to December 2011. This is 2% more than a year ago.

The average length of stay was unchanged at 3.3 bed days.

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