

## MEDIA RELEASE

### NSW emergency departments face increase in demand

The traditional 'Christmas rush' in NSW public hospital emergency departments was intense last year, with the number of patients seen eclipsing those treated at the height of the 2009 swine flu pandemic, a new Bureau of Health Information report shows.

The Bureau's third *Hospital Quarterly* report shows that more than half a million patients attended NSW emergency departments during October to December 2010 – nearly 30,000 more than in the previous quarter, nearly 21,000 more than the same time last year, and nearly 18,000 more than in July to September 2009, when the swine flu pandemic was at its peak.

Bureau Chief Executive Dr Diane Watson said attendances during the quarter were at a two-year high, with increased numbers generally seen across October and November as well as a Christmas holiday spike.

"In the face of extra pressure, emergency departments generally held their performance," Dr Watson said. "Patients were seen within recommended time frames for all triage categories, except triage category 3, where 71% of patients, rather than the recommended 75% were seen within the target time of 30 minutes. This compares to 73% one year ago."

The Bureau's report shows that 66% of patients across the state (compared to 64% last quarter and 72% last year) were transferred from an ambulance into the care of an emergency department within 30 minutes of arriving at hospital. The target is 90 per cent.

A total of 65% of patients, rather than the target of 80%, were admitted to hospital from the emergency department within the recommended eight hours, compared to 61% last quarter and 70% last year.

Unlike emergency departments, there is typically less elective surgery performed in public hospitals towards the end of each year. In 2010, this premise held true, with 7% fewer elective surgery procedures compared to the previous quarter. However, compared to a year ago, 5% more procedures were performed.

The proportion of patients receiving elective surgery on time has remained stable (at 92%) and there has been a continued decrease in the amount of time patients wait for non-urgent surgery. Median waits have dropped from 175 days last quarter to 169 days this quarter, although patients waited 23 days longer for non-urgent surgery than last year. Wait times for urgent and semi-urgent elective surgery have remained relatively unchanged.

"By examining the numbers presented in our regular reports, we see a story begin to unfold about how the state's hospitals are dealing with demand, how they compare to each other, where they excel, and where there might be opportunities to improve," Dr Watson said.

Performance profiles for individual hospitals, an At a Glance supplement, and information on two and five-year trends for emergency departments and elective surgery are available at [www.bhi.nsw.gov.au](http://www.bhi.nsw.gov.au)

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