

At a glance

Hospital Quarterly: Performance of NSW Public Hospitals

July to September 2010

The Bureau of Health Information's *Hospital Quarterly* reports provide the public with information on patients admitted to hospital, those who attend emergency departments and those who undergo elective surgery.

This second issue contains *Performance Profiles* with extra detail on elective surgery and more than doubles the number of hospitals reported on. For the first time, information is available about elective surgery activity in more than 80 hospitals and across the state. The report covers the number of elective surgery procedures performed over five years, how long patients wait for surgery and whether they are treated on time.

This issue also includes *Performance Profiles* on emergency departments in more than 60 hospitals. It addresses ambulance arrivals over a two-year period and emergency department time intervals such as waiting times for treatment.

Fast facts

From July to September 2010...	For the same period last year...	The difference...
There were 415,441 admitted patient episodes	404,362 episodes	11,079 (+2.7%)
Acute admitted patients stayed an average length of 3.5 days	3.5 days	unchanged
18,041 babies were born	17,835	206 (+1.2%)
54,580 elective surgical procedures were performed	51,148	3,432 (+6.7%)
The proportion of elective surgery patients treated on time was 91%	90%	1% increase
Median waiting time for elective surgery was 10 days for urgent surgery, 48 days for semi-urgent surgery and 175 days for non-urgent surgery	10, 46, 135 days	Increase of: 0%, 4%, 30%
There were 507,955 visits to NSW emergency departments	518,022	10,067 (-1.9%)
126,177 people travelled to the emergency department by ambulance	127,623	1,446 (-1.1%)
64% of people arriving by ambulance were transferred into the care of emergency department staff within the 30-minute target	68%	4% drop
There were 118,769 admissions to hospital from emergency departments	115,957	2,812 (+2.4%)
61% of people admitted from the emergency department arrived on the ward within the target of 8 hours of being triaged	65%	4% drop

In NSW public hospitals during July, August and September 2010, on average for each day...

5,521 people attended an emergency department
1,291 people were admitted to hospital from an emergency department
593 people had elective surgery
196 babies were born

Elective surgery

Surgery performed

There has been strong growth in the number of elective surgery procedures performed in NSW public hospitals over the past year, with numbers at a two-year high. During the July to September quarter, 54,580 elective procedures were performed. This represents 1,516 more procedures than last quarter and 3,432 more procedures than the same period last year – a 7% increase.

In each elective surgery urgency category there has also been growth over the past year. This quarter, 14,122 patients received urgent surgery (up 1%), 17,025 patients received semi-urgent surgery (up 10%) and 23,433 patients received non-urgent surgery (up 7%). Compared to last quarter the increases are 6% for urgent and semi-urgent surgery, and a 1% decrease for non-urgent surgery.

Elective surgery guidelines	
Category 1 Urgent	Admission within 30 days desirable for a condition that has the potential to deteriorate quickly to the point that it may become an emergency
Category 2 Semi-urgent	Admission within 90 days desirable for a condition which is not likely to deteriorate quickly or become an emergency
Category 3 Non-urgent	Admission within 365 days acceptable for a condition which is unlikely to deteriorate quickly and which has little potential to become an emergency

On-time admissions

In the July to September quarter, 91% of patients were admitted to hospital within the time frame recommended by their surgeon. This was similar to the same time last year and similar across all urgency categories, with 92% of patients in the most urgent category; 90% of patients in the semi-urgent category; and 91% of patients in the non-urgent category being admitted on time.

Compared to last quarter, 4% more patients overall were treated on time. This varied within each urgency category (see Table 1).

Median waiting times were 10 days for urgent surgery, 48 days for semi-urgent surgery and 175 days for non-urgent surgery (see Table 2).

During July to September, there was a considerable drop in the median number of days non-urgent surgery patients waited compared to the previous quarter (175 days compared to 205 days). This appears to reverse a four-quarter trend of increasing wait times for these patients. Future Bureau reports may shed more light on whether or not this is the beginning of a new downward trend in waits for non-urgent surgery.

Wait times for patients needing urgent and semi-urgent surgery did not change significantly compared to last quarter or the same time last year.

Elective surgery waits

Information on patients waiting for surgery is contained in reports released by the [NSW Department of Health: Current Waiting Times and Waiting Times Register by Specialty for NSW Hospitals](#).

Table 1: Percentage of elective surgery patients treated within recommended waiting time, by urgency category, July 2008 to September 2010

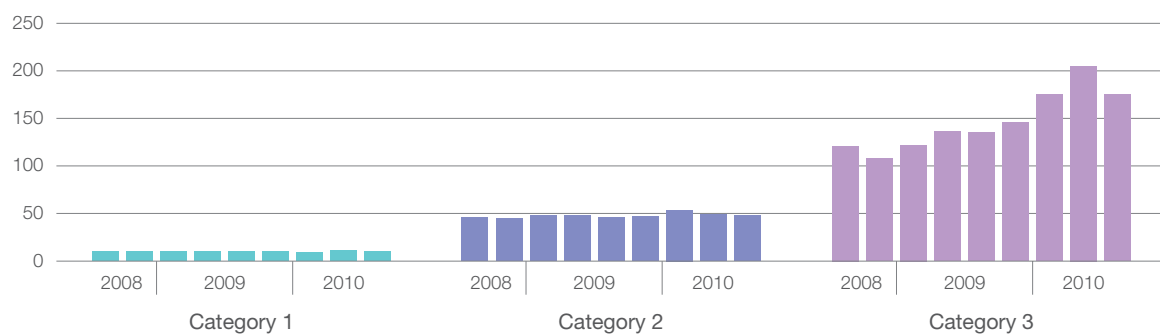
	Jul-Sept 2008	Oct-Dec 2008	Jan-Mar 2009	Apr-Jun 2009	Jul-Sept 2009	Oct-Dec 2009	Jan-Mar 2010	Apr-Jun 2010	Jul-Sept 2010
All categories	92%	91%	91%	90%	90%	89%	87%	87%	91%
Category 1	94%	93%	92%	91%	91%	93%	93%	91%	92%
Category 2	83%	84%	86%	86%	86%	85%	80%	86%	90%
Category 3	96%	95%	94%	91%	92%	89%	88%	86%	91%

Note: Patients treated on time refers to the percentage of patients admitted for elective surgery in the time frame recommended by their surgeon.

Note: Percentages might differ slightly from those reported in previous Hospital Quarterly reports and in the NSW Department of Health's *Quarterly Hospital Performance Report* due to differences in when data were extracted.

Source: Waiting List Collection On-line System, NSW Health. Data extracted for July to September 2010 quarter on 13 October 2010. Data extracted for all previous quarters on 30 September 2010.

Table 2: NSW elective surgery median waiting time (days), by urgency category, July 2008 to September 2010



Note: Median waiting time is the number of days it took for half of the patients who received elective surgery during the period to be admitted and receive their surgery. The other half took longer than the median to be admitted for surgery.

Note: Percentages might differ slightly from those reported in previous Hospital Quarterly reports and in the NSW Department of Health's *Quarterly Hospital Performance Report* due to differences in when data was extracted.

Source: Waiting List Collection On-line System, NSW Health. Data extracted for July to September 2010 quarter on 13 October 2010. Data extracted for all previous quarters on 30 September 2010.

Emergency departments

There were 507,955 attendances at public hospital emergency departments during July to September 2010. This is nearly 12,000 more patients than in the previous quarter.

Ambulance arrivals

An ambulance crew needs to wait with a patient until emergency department staff can accept the patient into their care. During the July to September 2010 quarter 64% of ambulance patients, rather than the target of 90%, were transferred into the care of the emergency department within 30 minutes of arrival. This is 4% lower than last quarter and for the same time last year (see Table 3).

Waiting time to treatment

There are targets that specify how long patients should wait from the time they are first assessed until they start treatment. These targets are based on five triage categories ranging from most to least urgent. The results for this quarter show a higher percentage of patients are being seen within target times compared to one year ago, although there has been a drop since the last quarter. State-wide, hospitals are seeing patients within recommended time frames for all categories except triage 3. In this category 69% of patients were seen within 30 minutes (rather than the target of 75%).

This is 3% higher than the same time last year but 5% lower than last quarter (see Table 4). To view these trends over time, see Table 8.

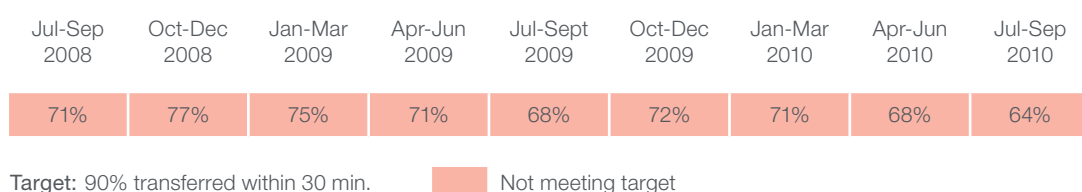
Arrival to departure time in the emergency department

More than 60% of patients who attend an emergency department receive treatment but are not admitted to hospital. The Bureau's *Hospital Quarterly* measures the time taken to leave the emergency department after triage. In the July to September quarter 38% of patients had left within two hours, 70% within four hours and 87% within six hours. The less urgent the triage category, the sooner the patient was discharged. There is no target for this measure (see Table 5).

When doctors decide to admit an emergency department patient to hospital, the target is for 80% of patients to be admitted within eight hours of arriving at the hospital. This target is a measure of Emergency Admission Performance (EAP).

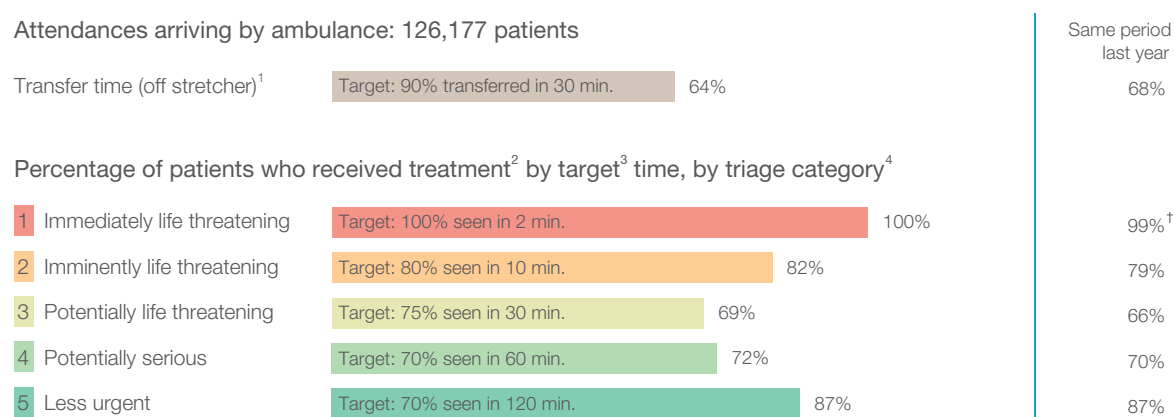
In the July to September quarter 61% of patients were admitted within eight hours, down 6% state-wide compared to the previous quarter and down 4% from a year ago. Almost all hospitals measured now have a lower EAP than last quarter (see Table 6, Table 7).

Table 3: Percentage of patients accepted into the care of the emergency department from an ambulance (off stretcher performance) in NSW, July 2008 to September 2010



Source: Ambulance Service, NSW. Data received on 13 October 2010.

Table 4: Waiting times in NSW emergency departments, July to September 2010



(†) Emergency department records for NSW recorded less than 100% triage 1 performance. The NSW Department of Health has advised that these records contained data entry errors and all patients received treatment within two minutes of being triaged. The Bureau has reported the percentage currently available on the Health Information Exchange.

1. Transfer time refers to the time between arrival and transfer to the care of the emergency department.
2. All unplanned and pre-arranged medical attendances excluding those without a recorded triage category, triage time, or treatment time.
3. Targets for triage levels are recommended by the Australasian College for Emergency Medicine.
4. At the start of the 2010-11 financial year, NSW modified the definition of triage performance. Patients who did not wait for care are excluded from this measure and arrival time is used if triage time is missing. Additional detail on the effect of this can be found in the Bureau's *Technical supplement: measures of emergency department patient activity and performance*.

Note: Numbers and percentages differ slightly from those previously reported by the NSW Department of Health's *Quarterly Hospital Performance Report* due to differences in when data were extracted from the emergency department information system. The Bureau also used a different approach to calculating performance information from hospitals transitioning to the new emergency department information system.

Source: Health Information Exchange, NSW Health. Data extracted on 18 October 2010. Ambulance patient numbers and off-stretcher time data provided by the NSW Ambulance Service on 13 October 2010.

Table 5: Percentage of patients discharged or transferred from the emergency department, by triage level and time interval,¹ July to September 2010

	2 hours	4 hours	6 hours	8 hours	10 hours	12 hours	14 hours
Triage 1: Immediately life threatening	18%	51%	73%	86%	93%	95%	96%
Triage 2: Imminently life threatening	17%	52%	74%	86%	92%	95%	97%
Triage 3: Potentially life threatening	26%	60%	81%	91%	95%	97%	98%
Triage 4: Potentially serious	40%	72%	88%	95%	97%	99%	99%
Triage 5: Less urgent	56%	83%	94%	98%	99%	100%	100%
All triage categories	38%	70%	87%	94%	97%	98%	99%

1. Time from triage (or arrival in the emergency department if triage time missing) until discharge or transfer from the emergency department.

Source: Health Information Exchange, NSW Health. Data extracted on 18 October 2010.

Table 6: Percentage of patients admitted to the ward from the emergency department, by triage level and time interval,¹ July to September 2010

	2 hours	4 hours	6 hours	8 hours (EAP)	10 hours	12 hours	14 hours
Triage 1: Immediately life threatening	17%	42%	63%	77%	83%	87%	91%
Triage 2: Imminently life threatening	6%	23%	46%	64%	75%	82%	86%
Triage 3: Potentially life threatening	4%	19%	40%	60%	72%	79%	85%
Triage 4: Potentially serious	6%	20%	39%	59%	72%	80%	85%
Triage 5: Less urgent	17%	35%	53%	70%	80%	86%	90%
All triage categories	6%	21%	41%	61%	73%	80%	85%

1. Time from triage (or arrival in the emergency department if triage time missing) until arrival on the ward for those admitted from the emergency department.

Note: At the start of the 2010-11 financial year, NSW adopted the Commonwealth definition of EAP. Patients who died in the emergency department or were admitted and discharged from the emergency department are now included in this measure. In addition, the period now begins from the time of triage (or arrival time, if triage time missing) rather than the start of treatment. Pre-arranged admissions have also been excluded. Additional detail on the effect of this can be found in the Bureau's *Technical supplement: measures of emergency department patient activity and performance*.

Source: Health Information Exchange, NSW Health. Data extracted on 18 October 2010.

Table 7: Emergency admission performance (EAP) in NSW emergency departments, July 2008 to September 2010

Jul-Sep 2008	Oct-Dec 2008	Jan-Mar 2009	Apr-Jun 2009	Jul-Sept 2009	Oct-Dec 2009	Jan-Mar 2010	Apr-Jun 2010	Jul-Sep 2010
66%	72%	70%	68%	65%	70%	68%	67%	61%

Target: 80% admitted within 8 hours

Not meeting target

Note: Percentages might differ slightly from those in previous *Hospital Quarterly* reports and in the NSW Department of Health's *Quarterly Hospital Performance Report* due to differences in when data were extracted from the emergency department information systems. The Bureau also used a different approach to calculating performance information from hospitals transitioning to the new emergency department information system.

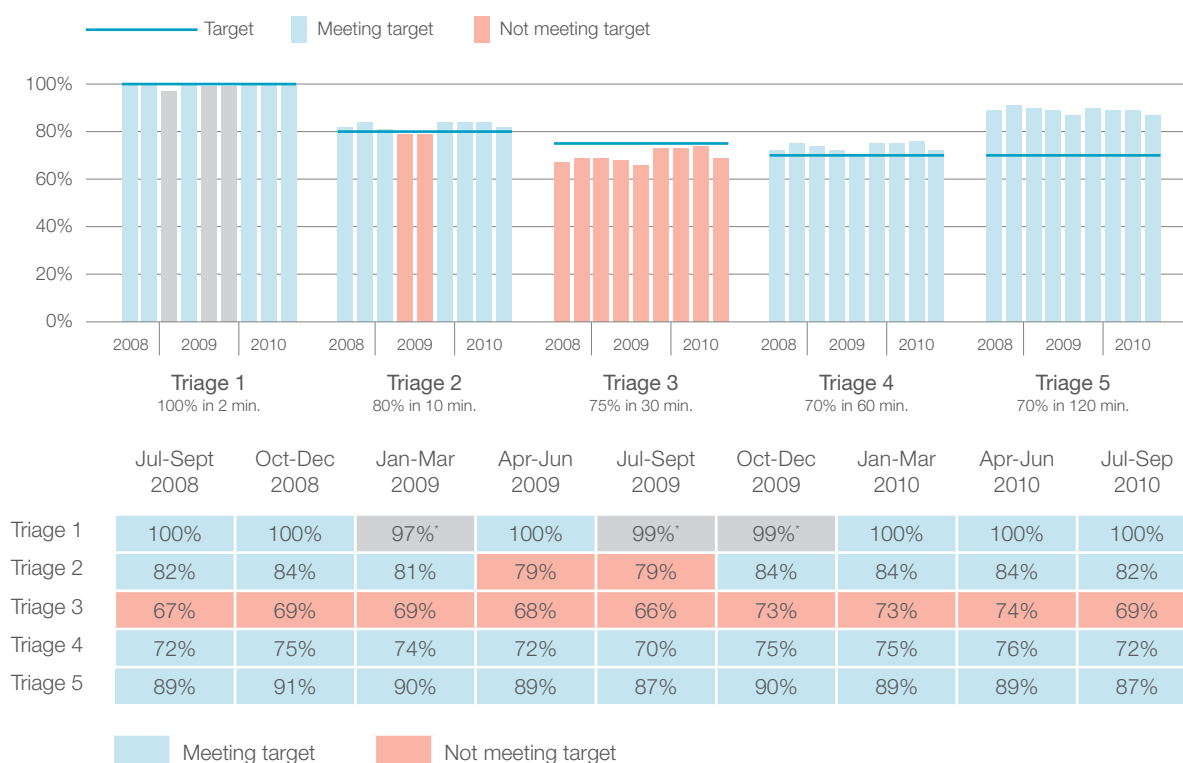
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Source: Health Information Exchange, NSW Health. Data extracted on 18 October 2010.

Learn more about the performance of your local hospital

Detailed information about the emergency department and elective surgery performance of individual hospitals across NSW for the July to September 2010 quarter is available on the Bureau of Health Information website www.bhi.nsw.gov.au

Table 8: Triage to treatment targets in NSW emergency departments, July 2008 to September 2010



Note: At the start of the 2010-11 financial year, NSW modified the definition of triage performance. Patients who did not wait for care are excluded from this measure and arrival time is used if triage time is missing. Additional detail on the effect of this can be found in the Bureau's *Technical supplement: measures of emergency department patient activity and performance*.

(*) Emergency department electronic records show these periods as having below 100% triage 1 performance (i.e. started to receive treatment within two minutes of being triaged). An investigation by the NSW Department of Health concluded that these electronic patient records contained data entry errors and all patients received treatment within two minutes of being triaged. The Bureau has reported the performance using electronic data available in the NSW Health Information Exchange on 18 October 2010.

Source: Health Information Exchange, NSW Health. Data extracted on 18 October 2010.

Download the report

The report, *Hospital Quarterly: Performance of NSW Public Hospitals, July to September 2010* and related reports are available at www.bhi.nsw.gov.au

The suite of products includes:

- *Hospital Quarterly: Performance of NSW Public Hospitals, July to September 2010*
- *Performance Profiles: elective surgery* (Performance and activity reports for NSW and more than 80 hospitals)
- *Performance Profiles: emergency department care* (Performance and activity reports for NSW and emergency departments in more than 60 hospitals)
- *Data Quality Assessments*
- *Technical Supplements*

About the Bureau

The Bureau of Health Information provides the community, healthcare professionals and the NSW Parliament with timely, accurate and comparable information on the performance of the NSW public health system in ways that enhance the system's accountability and inform efforts to increase its beneficial impact on the health and wellbeing of the people of NSW.

The Bureau is an independent, board-governed organisation established by the NSW Government to be the leading source of information on the performance of the public health system in NSW.

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