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Activity up for NSW emergency departments and ambulance services

The Bureau of Health Information (BHI) has today released its *Healthcare Quarterly* report showing NSW public hospital and ambulance services were very busy during the April to June 2019 quarter.

There were more than 754,000 presentations to emergency departments (EDs), an increase of 8.2% compared with the same quarter in 2018. The timeliness of care provided in EDs was down across key measures at state level.

The report shows, compared with the same quarter last year:

- About seven in 10 ED (71.8%) patients were treated within clinically recommended timeframes, down 4.8 percentage points.
- Seven in 10 patients (70.6%) spent four hours or less in the ED, down 3.4 percentage points.
- Almost nine in 10 patients (87.6%) who arrived by ambulance had their care transferred to ED staff within 30 minutes, down 4.0 percentage points.

“Emergency departments were once again busier than they were in the same quarter a year ago, with more presentations overall and more patients arriving by ambulance,” BHI Chief Executive Dr Diane Watson said.

“A typical patient in NSW will have waited longer for their treatment to start and spent more time overall in the emergency department. However, there is considerable variation in performance when you look at the results for individual hospitals,” Dr Watson said.

The report shows that the April to June 2019 quarter was also a busy one for NSW Ambulance, with almost 310,000 responses – up 9.7% compared with the same quarter last year.

“Despite a 12% increase in the number of ambulance responses to life-threatening cases, the median response time remained stable at 7.5 minutes, which is a very positive result. However, response times did slip slightly for less urgent cases,” Dr Watson said.

This is the first issue of *Healthcare Quarterly* to include quarterly reporting of seclusion and restraint for the 46 NSW public hospitals with one or more specialised acute mental health inpatient units.

Most episodes of care in these units did not have a seclusion or physical restraint event – 3.0% of episodes had at least one seclusion event and 4.4% of episodes had at least one physical restraint event.

In April to June 2019, there were 649 seclusion events and 920 physical restraint events, up 12 and 109 respectively compared with the same quarter last year. The average duration of seclusion events was 5 hours and 7 minutes, down 14 minutes, and the average duration of physical restraint events was 5 minutes, down 1 minute.

“BHI’s quarterly reporting on seclusion and restraint is an important and positive development as it increases the transparency of these practices in NSW public hospitals for the community,” Dr Watson said.

The *Healthcare Quarterly* report and associated information products, including local hospital and ambulance information, are available at bhi.nsw.gov.au

Note: BHI does not report on seclusion and restraint events in non-acute specialised mental health inpatient units or in emergency departments.

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