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NSW public hospitals experience record levels of demand

Patient demand for NSW public hospitals was higher in July to September 2019 than any previous quarter, the latest Bureau of Health Information (BHI) *Healthcare Quarterly* report shows.

The quarter saw the highest numbers of emergency department (ED) presentations, elective surgical procedures performed and admitted patient episodes since BHI began reporting these data in 2010.

There were more than 760,000 ED presentations across the state – an increase of 6.6% compared with the same quarter last year, as well as more than 60,000 elective surgical procedures performed (up 3.6%) and almost 500,000 admitted patient episodes (up 1.9%).

BHI Chief Executive Dr Diane Watson said ED activity continued on an upward trend, eclipsing the previous highest number experienced in January to March 2019. ED presentations have exceeded 750,000 every quarter since the beginning of the year.

“Over the course of a year, the number of people presenting to EDs each quarter tends to show peaks and troughs, with the winter quarter generally the busiest,” Dr Watson said.

“However, over the past year we have not seen the seasonal troughs in ED activity you would expect. Instead, demand has remained very high every quarter, leading up to another record number of presentations in this latest busy winter period.”

The timeliness of care provided in EDs was down across key measures in July to September 2019. The report shows, compared with the same quarter last year:

- About seven in 10 ED (70.2%) patients were treated within clinically recommended timeframes, down 3.2 percentage points.
- Fewer than seven in 10 patients (68.1%) spent four hours or less in the ED, down 3.3 percentage points.
- More than eight in 10 patients who arrived by ambulance (84.4%) had their care transferred to ED staff within 30 minutes, down 4.9 percentage points.

NSW Ambulance was also very busy in July to September 2019, with more than 320,000 responses, up 7.6% compared with the same quarter last year.

“Despite an almost 8% increase in the number of ambulance responses to life-threatening cases, the median response time for these cases remained stable at seven and a half minutes. However, people in less urgent categories did wait slightly longer for paramedics to arrive,” Dr Watson said.

BHI also released survey results today that reflect the experiences of more than 3,000 children and young people who were admitted to one of three public specialist paediatric hospitals in NSW: John Hunter Children’s Hospital; Sydney Children’s Hospital, Randwick; or The Children’s Hospital at Westmead.

Detailed results from *Healthcare Quarterly* and the Admitted Children and Young Patients Survey 2018 are available at bhi.nsw.gov.au