



The Royal College of Emergency Medicine

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Latest Emergency Care data shows NI health service in a 'serious situation'

Emergency Care data published today by the Department of Health for April - June 2021 (Quarter 1 2021) show that in June 2021, 67,857 patients attended EDs in Northern Ireland, 13,416 (24.6%) more than June 2020 (54,441).

In June 2021 only 53.9% of patients attending Type 1 EDs in Northern Ireland were treated and discharged or admitted within four hours, 11.6 percentage points less than June 2020 (65.5%). Furthermore, the median waiting time for those admitted into hospital was 9 hours. The figures published for Quarter 1 2021 represent the worst four-hour performance on record for Northern Ireland.

In June 2021, 5,488 patients waited over twelve hours in Type 1 EDs in Northern Ireland, the highest number of long waits since January 2021 and the second worst performance on record.

Responding to the data, Royal College of Emergency Medicine Vice President for Northern Ireland, Dr Paul Kerr, said: "These figures show Emergency Department patients and staff face a serious situation of deteriorating performance and conditions. This is posing a threat to patient safety and staff wellbeing.

"Ambulances are waiting longer to offload, and patients are suffering prolonged delays in being assessed and treated, with those needing to be admitted experiencing the worst waits. The waiting time to initial assessment continues to rise and, very concerningly, many patients are not waiting to be seen and leaving without assessment. The percentage of patients commencing treatment within two hours of assessment has also declined significantly.

"Severe crowding is occurring in all departments, and it is completely unacceptable that the median average wait for admission is nine hours. Not only is this bad for patients but it's a truly demoralising picture for an exhausted workforce, who continue to do their very best in difficult circumstances. Many nurses are choosing to leave Trusts and moving to jobs with agencies, the private sector or the community.

"COVID numbers have not yet stabilised, and admissions are rising again causing serious concern.

"We know that last year the number of elective procedures nearly halved due to covid. These are real people waiting for surgery, but as a result of having their procedures postponed, may experience complications and have to go to their Emergency Department for help. This may mean that a bed earmarked for elective surgery may have to be used for the emergency care of a patient who has experience complications of a cancelled operation, creating a vicious circle.

Excellence in Emergency Care

“Without an expansion of staffed bed capacity there is only so much EDs can do – patients will continue to have a rough time and the health service will see waiting lists for operations grow ever longer.

“It is vital that the Department of Health work to find ways of enabling hospitals to free up as much capacity as possible ahead of the winter and whole system solutions are vital if performance is to be improved.”

-ENDS-

Contact

For further information, or to speak with a spokesperson for The Royal College of Emergency Medicine (between 9am and 5pm), please contact Luke O’Reilly at luke.oreilly@rcem.ac.uk or on 0207 067 1275.

For out of hours enquiries, please contact Gordon Miles at gordon.miles@rcem.ac.uk or on 07715 456 784.

About RCEM

The Royal College of Emergency Medicine is the single authoritative body for Emergency Medicine in the UK. Emergency Medicine is the medical specialty which provides doctors and consultants to A&E departments in the NHS in the UK and other healthcare systems across the world.

The Royal College works to ensure high quality care by setting and monitoring standards of care, and providing expert guidance and advice on policy to relevant bodies on matters relating to Emergency Medicine.

The Royal College has over 10,000 fellows and members, who are doctors and consultants in emergency departments working in the health services in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland and across the world.