

At a glance

Hospital Quarterly: Performance of NSW public hospitals

October to December 2011

The Bureau of Health Information's latest *Hospital Quarterly* report adds to the evolving picture of hospital performance and patient use of hospitals in NSW. In three separate modules, it reports on admitted patients, those who attended emergency departments (EDs) and those who underwent elective surgery during October to December 2011.

Hospital Quarterly looks at the number of elective surgery procedures performed, how long patients waited for their surgery and whether they were treated on time.

This issue also reports on three emergency department time intervals: waiting times for treatment, time from arrival to discharge and time from arrival to admission to the hospital. This information is profiled over five years so people can identify areas to improve and assess whether any improvements have been sustained.

Detailed information on elective surgery performance for more than 80 hospitals and emergency department care in more than 60 hospitals is available in the Performance Profiles on the Bureau's website

www.bhi.nsw.gov.au

During the quarter	Oct-Dec 2011	Oct-Dec 2010	The difference
Admitted patient episodes	421,033 episodes	411,442 episodes	+9,591 (+2%)
Average length of stay for acute admitted patients	3.3 days	3.3 days	unchanged
Elective surgical procedures performed	51,432 procedures	50,810 procedures	+622 (+1%)
Elective surgery patients treated on time	92% on time	91% on time	+1 percentage point
Median waiting time for non-urgent surgery (days)	211 days	205 days	+6 days (+3%)
Visits to NSW Emergency Departments	538,068 visits	534,765 visits	+3,303 (+1%)
People travelling to NSW emergency departments by ambulance	132,661 people	128,151 people	+4,510 (+4%)
Admissions to hospital from NSW emergency departments	144,478 admissions	138,421 admissions	+6,057 (+4%)
Time within which half (50%) of admitted patients left the emergency department	6 hours 35 minutes	6 hours 36 minutes	-1 minute
Time within which most (95%) admitted patients left the emergency department	19 hours 34 minutes	19 hours 10 minutes	+24 minutes

In NSW public hospitals during October to December 2011, on average for each day ...

4,576 people were admitted to hospital

559 people had elective surgery

5,849 people attended an emergency department

1,570 people were admitted to hospital as emergency admissions

Elective surgery

Number of procedures performed

Each year there is a strong seasonal effect on the number of elective surgery procedures performed in NSW. The number of procedures falls sharply across all urgency categories in December and, to a greater extent, January, and peaks during the July to September quarter. During the October to December 2011 quarter, there were 51,432 elective procedures. This is 7% lower than the last quarter (in line with the usual season pattern), but up 1% from the same quarter one year ago.

Compared with the same quarter one year ago, less surgery was performed in the urgent category (down 3%) but more surgery was performed in the semi-urgent (up 5%) and non-urgent (up 6%) categories. Staged surgery decreased by 19%.

Urgent procedures made up 25% of all completed elective surgery for this quarter; semi-urgent made up 32%; non-urgent made up 37%; and staged procedures made up 6% of all completed elective 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

Most patients continued to receive their elective surgery on time during the quarter, with 92% of patients admitted to hospital within the time frame recommended by their surgeon. This is the same as the previous quarter and slightly higher than the same time one year ago (91%).

Performance across urgency categories remained high, with 94% of patients in the urgent category; 91% of those considered semi-urgent and 91% of patients in the non-urgent category being admitted on time (Figure 1).

Surgery waiting times

During the October to December 2011 quarter, median waiting times were 11 days for urgent surgery, 47 days for semi-urgent surgery and 211 days for non-urgent surgery (Figure 2).

The median waiting times have changed little since the same quarter in 2010 for patients needing urgent and semi-urgent surgery (11 and 46 days respectively). The median waiting time for non-urgent procedures was 211 days, up by 6 days when compared with the same quarter in 2010.

Elective surgery waits

Information on patients waiting for surgery is contained in reports released by the NSW Ministry of Health, *Current Waiting Times and Waiting Times Register by Specialty for NSW Hospitals* (available at www.health.nsw.gov.au).

Figure 1: Percentage of elective surgery patients treated within recommended waiting time, by urgency category, October 2009 to December 2011

	Oct-Dec 2009	Jan-Mar 2010	Apr-Jun 2010	Jul-Sep 2010	Oct-Dec 2010	Jan-Mar 2011	Apr-Jun 2011	Jul-Sep 2011	Oct-Dec 2011
All categories	88%	86%	87%	91%	91%	90%	92%	92%	92%
Urgent ¹	93%	93%	91%	92%	93%	92%	93%	93%	94%
Semi-urgent ¹	84%	80%	86%	90%	90%	87%	91%	90%	91%
Non-urgent ²	88%	87%	85%	90%	91%	92%	92%	92%	91%

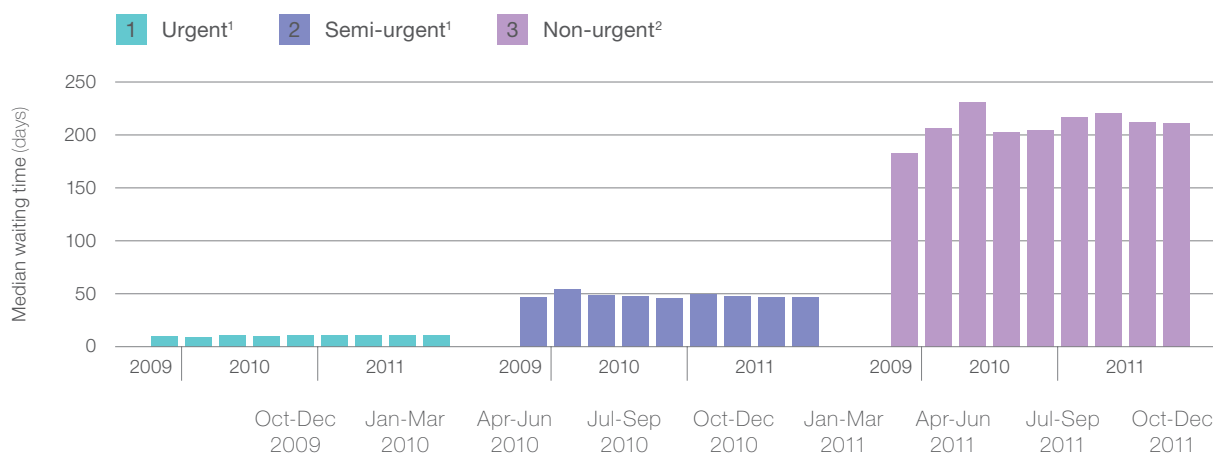
1. Excluding staged procedures.

2. Excluding staged procedures and non-urgent cystoscopy.

Note: Because of changes in methods and reporting, numbers of surgical procedures by urgency category will differ from those reported in previous NSW Ministry of Health's *Quarterly Hospital Performance Reports* and Bureau *Hospital Quarterly* reports published prior to May 2011.

Source: Waiting List Collection On-line System, NSW Health. Data extracted for July to September 2011 and October to December 2011 on 16 January 2012. Data extracted for all previous quarters on 15 July 2011.

Figure 2: NSW elective surgery median waiting time (days), by urgency category, October 2009 to December 2011



1. Excluding staged procedures.

2. Excluding staged procedures and non-urgent cystoscopy.

Note: Patients recorded as 'deferred' when they received their surgery are allocated to 'ready for care' urgency categories as appropriate.

Note: Because of changes in methods and reporting, numbers of surgical procedures by urgency category will differ from those reported in previous NSW Ministry of Health's *Quarterly Hospital Performance Reports* and Bureau *Hospital Quarterly* reports published prior to May 2011.

Source: Waiting List Collection On-line System, NSW Health. Data extracted for July to September 2011 and October to December 2011 on 16 January 2012. Data extracted for all previous quarters on 15 July 2011.

Emergency departments

Understanding ED performance reporting

In 2011, the Bureau reviewed its approach to reporting time measures of ED performance, including a detailed analysis of the data and consultation with a wide range of stakeholders with expertise in ED care and electronic information systems. As a result, in the July to September 2011 issue, the Bureau took a new approach to reporting to more closely reflect patients' journeys and permit fairer comparisons between hospitals and across time.

The Bureau now presents the times 50% and 95% of patients began treatment within. We also show the times 50% and 95% of admitted patients left the ED within. This information is presented for each quarter of the past five years so people can identify areas to improve and whether any improvements have been sustained.

There is more detail on how to interpret this new information on [pages 16 and 17](#) of the Emergency Department module in this issue of *Hospital Quarterly*.

Ambulance arrivals

More than half a million patients attended NSW public hospital EDs during October to December 2011, 1% more than during the same quarter one year ago. The greatest increases were seen in the more urgent triage categories.

The number of ambulance arrivals has increased by 4% compared with the same quarter one year ago, and was disproportionately larger than the increase in emergency attendances (up 1%).

In the October to December 2011 quarter, 25% of all people who attended EDs arrived by ambulance, a total of 132,661 patients.

During the quarter, 65% of patients arriving by ambulance were transferred into the care of the ED within 30 minutes of arrival. This compares with 61% in the last quarter and 66% a year ago ([Figure 3](#)). The target is 90%.

Time to treatment

The time from presentation until treatment fluctuates throughout the year. At a state level, the time appears to be gradually increasing, however, the trend is affected by progressive implementation of new information systems.

Compared to the same quarter in 2010, the time within which half of patients began treatment was largely unchanged, and the time within which most (95%) patients began treatment was similar or lower ([Figure 4](#)):

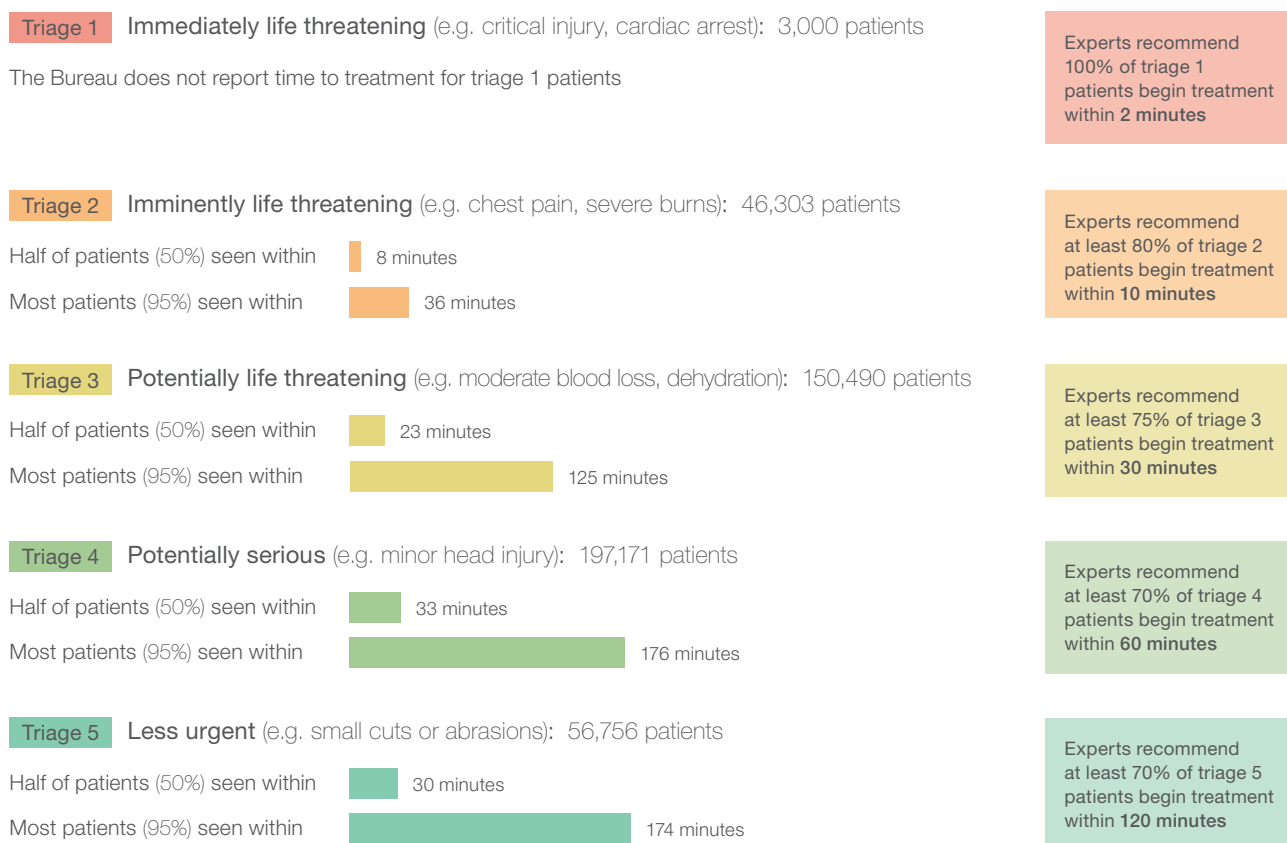
- Half of all patients with conditions triaged as imminently life threatening (triage 2) started treatment within eight minutes of presentation and most (95%) began treatment within 36 minutes
- Half of all patients with conditions triaged as potentially life threatening (triage 3) started treatment within 23 minutes of presentation and most (95%) began treatment within 125 minutes
- Half of all patients with conditions triaged as potentially serious (triage 4) started treatment within 33 minutes of presentation and most (95%) began treatment within 176 minutes
- Half of all patients with conditions triaged as less urgent (triage 5) started treatment within 30 minutes of presentation and most (95%) began treatment within 174 minutes.

Figure 3: Ambulance arrivals and percentage of patients accepted into the care of NSW emergency departments from an ambulance within 30 minutes of arrival, October 2009 to December 2011

	Oct-Dec 2009	Jan-Mar 2010	Apr-Jun 2010	Jul-Sep 2010	Oct-Dec 2010	Jan-Mar 2011	Apr-Jun 2011	Jul-Sep 2011	Oct-Dec 2011
Off-stretcher time (OST)	72%	71%	68%	64%	66%	66%	65%	61%	65%
Ambulance arrivals	125,821	122,268	122,200	126,177	128,151	124,729	127,486	132,452	132,661

Source: Data provided by NSW Ambulance Service on 18 January 2012.

Figure 4: Waiting times for treatment in NSW emergency departments, October to December 2011



Note: Presentation time is the earliest time recorded (arrival, triage or treatment time) for the patient being in the ED.
Note: Treatment time is the earliest time recorded when a healthcare professional gives medical care for the patient's presenting problems.
Source: Health Information Exchange, NSW Health. Data extracted on 30 January 2012.

Treated and discharged home or transferred to another hospital

Most patients (63%) received treatment in the ED and were either discharged home or transferred to another hospital. Overall, more than one-third of these patients (36%) left hospital within two hours of presentation and, by eight hours, 94% of all patients who were not admitted had left the ED.

Patients from the less urgent triage categories left the ED soonest; more than half (56%) of discharged and transferred patients with conditions triaged as less urgent (triage 5) left within two hours compared with 16% for patients

with conditions triaged as immediately life threatening (triage 1). Figure 5 shows the times in which patients from each triage category left the ED.

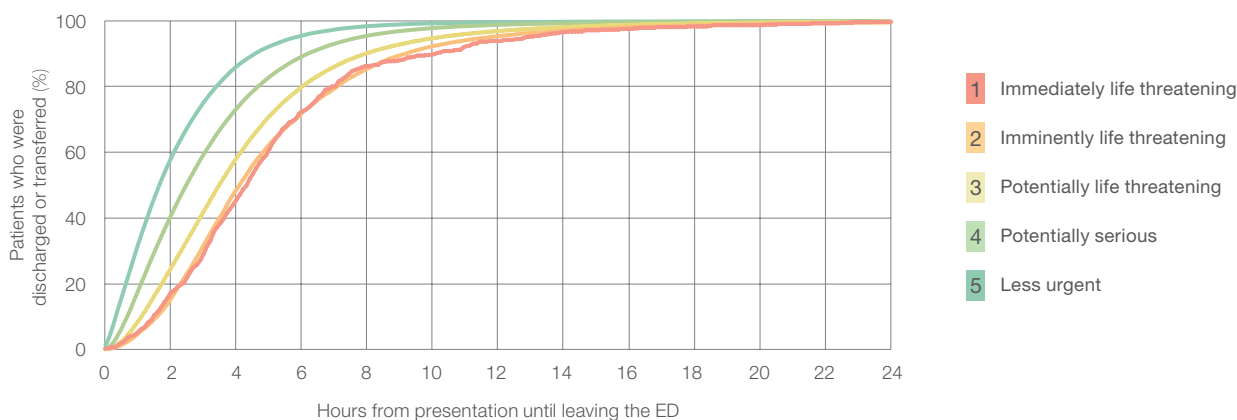
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Figure 5: Percentage of emergency patients who were treated and discharged or transferred from NSW EDs, by triage category and time interval, October to December 2011



1 hour 2 hours 3 hours 4 hours 6 hours 8 hours 12 hours 24 hours

	1 hour	2 hours	3 hours	4 hours	6 hours	8 hours	12 hours	24 hours
Triage 1: Immediately life threatening	4%	16%	27%	44%	72%	86%	94%	100%
Triage 2: Imminently life threatening	4%	14%	30%	47%	71%	85%	95%	99%
Triage 3: Potentially life threatening	7%	23%	40%	57%	79%	90%	97%	100%
Triage 4: Potentially serious	15%	38%	58%	72%	89%	95%	99%	100%
Triage 5: Less urgent	29%	56%	74%	85%	95%	98%	100%	100%
All triage categories	15%	36%	54%	69%	86%	94%	98%	100%

Note: Time from presentation to the ED until discharge or transfer from the emergency department.
Source: Health Information Exchange, NSW Health. Data extracted on 30 January 2012.

Treated and admitted to hospital

There were 114,478 emergency admissions, 4% higher than the same quarter one year ago.

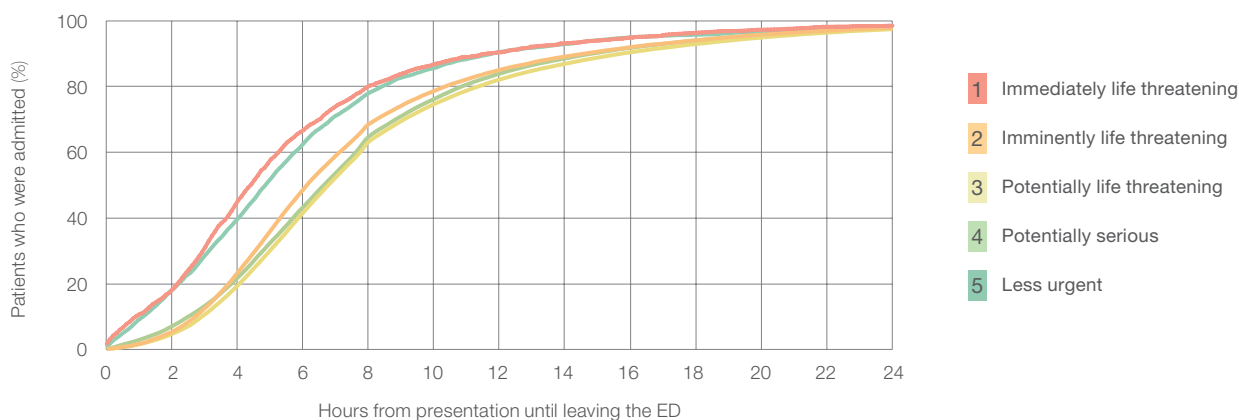
Some patients (28%) received treatment in the ED and were subsequently admitted to a ward, a critical care unit or via an operating suite in the hospital.

In the October to December 2011 quarter, two in 10 (21%) patients admitted to hospital left the ED within four hours of presentation and, by 12 hours, 83% of all admitted patients had left the ED.

Half of admitted patients left the ED within six hours and 35 minutes of presentation. Most (95%) had left the ED within 19 hours and 34 minutes of presentation. This is shorter than in the last quarter when most (95%) admitted emergency patients left the ED within 22 hours and five minutes, but longer than the same quarter in 2010 when most (95%) admitted emergency patients left the ED within 19 hours and 10 minutes.

Figure 6 shows the time in which admitted patients from each triage category left the ED.

Figure 6: Percentage of emergency patients who were treated and admitted from NSW EDs, by triage category and time interval, October to December 2011



1 hour 2 hours 3 hours 4 hours 6 hours 8 hours 12 hours 24 hours

Triage 1: Immediately life threatening	10%	17%	30%	44%	66%	80%	90%	98%
Triage 2: Imminently life threatening	1%	5%	12%	22%	48%	68%	85%	98%
Triage 3: Potentially life threatening	1%	4%	10%	19%	41%	63%	82%	97%
Triage 4: Potentially serious	3%	7%	13%	21%	43%	64%	84%	98%
Triage 5: Less urgent	8%	17%	27%	39%	62%	78%	90%	98%
All triage categories	2%	6%	12%	21%	44%	65%	83%	98%

Note: Time from presentation to the ED until recorded as leaving the emergency department for admitted patients.

Source: Health Information Exchange, NSW Health. Data extracted on 30 January 2012

Download our reports

The report, *Hospital Quarterly: Performance of NSW public hospitals, October to December 2011* and related reports are available at www.bhi.nsw.gov.au

The suite of products includes:

- Three core modules on Admitted Patients, Elective Surgery and Emergency Departments
- *Performance Profiles: Elective surgery* (performance and activity reports for more than 80 hospitals and NSW as a whole)
- *Performance Profiles: Emergency department care* (activity reports for EDs in more than 60 hospitals and NSW as a whole)
- *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 statutory health corporation. The conclusions in this report are those of the Bureau and no official endorsement by the NSW Minister for Health, the NSW Department of Health or any other NSW public health organisation is intended or should be inferred.

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State Health Publication Number: (BHI) 120024
ISSN 1838-3238

Suggested citation: Bureau of Health Information. *Hospital Quarterly: Performance of NSW public hospitals, October to December 2011. At a glance. 2(4).* Sydney (NSW); 2012.

Published March 2012

Please note that there is the potential for minor revisions of data in this report. Please check the online version at www.bhi.nsw.gov.au for any amendments.