

18 March 2020

Record number of attendances at NSW emergency departments

More people attended emergency departments (EDs) in NSW public hospitals during October to December 2019 than any previous quarter, the latest Bureau of Health Information (BHI) *Healthcare Quarterly* report shows.

The results for the final quarter of 2019 also show that ED attendances in NSW public hospitals exceeded 750,000 every quarter that year. For the first time since BHI began reporting these data in 2010, the number of attendances for the calendar year surpassed three million.

There were more than 776,000 ED attendances in the October to December 2019 quarter – up 3.6% (26,787) compared with the same quarter in 2018. The number of arrivals by ambulance was up 5.5% (9,370) to 178,465.

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

- About seven in 10 ED patients (72.6%) were treated within clinically recommended timeframes, down 1.3 percentage points.
- About seven in 10 patients (69.8%) spent four hours or less in the ED, down 2.3 percentage points.
- Almost nine in 10 patients who arrived by ambulance (87.9%) had their care transferred to ED staff within 30 minutes, down 2.2 percentage points.

BHI Chief Executive Dr Diane Watson said the high levels of ED activity in October to December 2019 reflect an ongoing trend of increased demand, which has been particularly evident since the last quarter of 2018.

“These latest results also show a typical patient in NSW will have waited slightly longer for their treatment to start in the ED and spent slightly more time in the ED overall. However, there is considerable variation in performance when you look at the results for individual hospitals,” Dr Watson said.

NSW Ambulance was also busy during October to December 2019, with more than 317,000 responses, up 3.5% (10,651) compared with the same quarter in 2018.

There was an increase of 5.2% (335) to 6,717 responses to the highest priority, life-threatening cases. The median response time for these cases remained unchanged at 7.6 minutes, with about seven in 10 life-threatening cases (69.6%) reached within 10 minutes, down 1.1 percentage points.

The number of elective surgical procedures performed in NSW public hospitals during the October to December 2019 quarter was 57,614, up 2.4% (1,347) compared with the same quarter the previous year.

The median waiting times for elective surgery were 11 days for urgent procedures (up one day), 46 days for semi-urgent procedures (up two days) and 237 days for non-urgent surgeries (up 15 days).

Detailed results for the October to December 2019 issue of *Healthcare Quarterly*, including at hospital and local health district levels, are available at bhi.nsw.gov.au