

THOUSANDS FACING MORE THAN 16 WEEKS TO SEE DOC

Patients risk BLINDNESS waiting for appointment

CRISIS Patients face anxious wait to see specialists



CONCERN Jackie Baillie
NHS is in 'perpetual crisis, says angry MSP
BY VIVIENNE AITKEN

SCOTLAND'S NHS is now in "perpetual crisis" and lives will be lost according to opposition politicians.

New figures released by Public Health Scotland yesterday showed thousands of patients are now waiting more than two years to see a medical professional.

PHS statistics revealed more than 150,000 patients currently waiting for key diagnostic tests, an increase of 10 per cent from the previous quarter and a rise of 75.8 per cent from the average in the 12 months prior to the pandemic.

Of those waiting more than half had been waiting more than six weeks.

Further statistics showed there were more than 420,000 people waiting to be seen at hospital after a referral and of that number 50.4 per cent had already waited longer than the targeted 12 weeks. A total of 4655 patients have currently been waiting for more than two years.

Meanwhile, A & E queues continue to be poor with just 70.2 per cent of patients seen in four hours.

Scottish Labour's health spokeswoman Jackie Baillie said: "Despite warning after warning, SNP failure has turned a winter A&E crisis into a perpetual crisis which is set to persist. Waiting lists are spiralling out of control in Scotland while the SNP sit on their hands.

Lib-Dem leader Alex Cole-Hamilton said: "The long waits that patients are facing are worse than ever and the backlog of people needing treatment is growing fast.

"These appalling figures show why the attentions of ministers must be squarely upon the NHS."

30,000 struggling with sight issues

ALMOST 30,000 patients with sight issues have been languishing on waiting lists far longer than the guaranteed treatment time.

EXCLUSIVE
BY VIVIENNE AITKEN
Health Editor

For some of them the lengthy waits will mean they will go blind while they wait for their appointment.

Others will have to rely on benefits because their vision has deteriorated to such an extent that they are no longer able to hold down their job.

And the shocking new statistics show the thousands waiting more than 16 weeks for an appointment make up half of all ophthalmology patients.

There is a 12-week-target for outpatient appointments.

Cathy Yelf, CEO of the Macular Society, said: "Capacity shortages can have very serious implications for patients, with delayed follow up (both at the time of diagnosis and during ongoing care) found to be a factor in sight loss."

"The progressive nature of conditions such as wet age-related macular degeneration means that delays to treatment can result in poorer outcomes for patients with sight loss."

Craig Spalding, CEO of Sight Scotland, explained: "If you are waiting weeks to hear back or are given an appointment many months in advance people can become quite distressed.

"There needs to be system changes to reduce the backlogs and increase output of people being seen. We are hearing

more and more about people being told ophthalmologist's triaging of conditions don't put cataracts as one of the top priority issues, yet that is a very reversible condition."

Spalding said the charity was calling for more work to be done by community optometrists, including early diagnoses of conditions like glaucoma, which would put less pressure on hospital services. He said: "Currently if optometrists spot something they have to refer a patient for a consultation with an ophthalmologist which can result in a lengthy wait for the same diagnosis and a longer treatment pathway. We want the government to be proactive and identify funding to help reduce the backlog.

"It is not good enough from our point of view that there is an ever-growing waiting list. They need to invest in the sector more and train more people in the speciality of ophthalmology. Reducing waiting lists must be a key priority."

Stuart McMillan, the SNP chairman of the cross-party group on visual impairment, said: "The fact ophthalmology has the third biggest outpatient speciality in Scotland's NHS is hugely important. I will raise issues with the Government and the event in parliament is extremely important to indicate some of the challenges the department faces."

You battle for an appointment

CAROL Brown knows the importance of getting eye appointments in time as she has already lost a lot of vision in one eye.

Carol, 64, from Haddington, East Lothian has wet age-related macular degeneration which has left her unable to read with her right eye and has created central

vision distortion. Carol said: "My main concern is keeping my left eye in good condition.

"I am pretty vocal so I always make sure I get my injection in time. If the consultant says to have my next one in six weeks and I don't get an appointment through for 14 weeks I will push for an earlier one."



EYE PROBLEMS Carol

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