Indicator 13.5 - Proportion of cancer patients waiting more than one month between diagnosis (decision to treat) and treatment by Primary Care Trust

Rationale
Cancer is a term used to describe a group of diseases that affect different parts of the body. Other terms used are neoplastic disease or malignancy. Cancer accounts for nearly 30% of all deaths among men in England every year and nearly 25% of deaths among women every year.

An audit in 1998 found that waiting times for diagnosis and treatment of cancer were long; the National Cancer Patient Survey in 2000 demonstrated that the proportion of patients reporting deterioration in their condition was closely correlated with the length of wait. To tackle this, the NHS Cancer Plan\(^1\) included a series of targets to reduce the waiting times for different cancers, which have been outlined in successive Priorities and Planning Frameworks\(^2\-^4\), culminating in the target of a maximum one month (31 day) wait from diagnosis to first treatment for all cancers by December 2005. Where patients wait longer this should be because of the needs of the diagnostic process or their personal choice, not because of inbuilt delays in the system of care.

Existing indicator sets
This indicator is a PCT performance indicator.

Definition
The number of patients waiting more than 31 days for their first definitive treatment for cancer from the date of decision to treat (as a proxy for diagnosis) divided by the number of patients receiving their first definitive treatment for a new cancer, expressed as a percentage.

Source of indicator
Care Quality Commission.

Numerator definition
The number of patients waiting more than 31 days for their first definitive treatment of a new decision to treat (as a proxy for diagnosis) for cancer.

The decision to treat date is the date of the consultation in which the patient and clinician agree the treatment plan for first treatment. Decision to treat is used as a proxy for diagnosis.
as, for example, in testicular cancer, orchidectomy is counted as the first definitive treatment, although definitive diagnosis will be obtained from this operation.

It only applies to patients with newly diagnosed cancer, not a recurrence of an already diagnosed cancer. It excludes patients who refuse treatment or who die before treatment but includes patients for whom no anticancer treatment is available but who are offered palliative interventions or care (e.g. stenting or symptom control respectively), and those in clinical trials.

An adjustment to the waiting time of a patient is applicable in the some circumstances:

- Patient cancelled an outpatient appointment
- Patient Did Not Attend (DNA) an outpatient appointment
- Patient defers an admission
- Suspension for patient reasons (often referred to as social suspension)
- Suspension for medical reasons

For more information see *Cancer waiting targets. A guide*.

**Source of numerator**

National cancer waiting times database. Data are published as part of the Care Quality Commission annual health check and can be found at ‘existing national targets’.

It is presented within this data set as number treated *within* 31 days so number waiting more than 31 days is calculated as the denominator minus number treated within 31 days.

**Denominator definition**

The total number of patients receiving their first definitive treatment for cancer.

**Source of denominator**

National cancer waiting times database. Data are published as part of the Care Quality Commission annual health check and can be found at ‘existing national targets’.

**Geographic coverage**

The data for this indicator is available at PCT and NHS trust level.

**Other dimensions of inequality**

No other dimensions of inequality are recorded for this indicator.
**Timeliness**

In April 2004 DH mandated the use of the National Cancer Waiting Times Database to monitor performance against the targets. Monthly and quarterly reports are made. Trusts must submit data within the 25th working day after the end of the reporting period. The information used for the performance ratings is from the last quarter of the financial year and is published annually by the Care Quality Commission.

**Accuracy and completeness**

NHS Trusts are required to enter details on all NHS cancer patients using the cancer waiting times database (hosted on Open Exeter). A report is taken each month and quarter as part of the national monitoring of waiting times and is a snapshot of the real time situation on that date.

Trusts are recommended to check that all new patients are identified, including cross-referencing against pathology and hospital information systems, and to upload the data well before the submission date to allow time for validation, as once submitted it cannot be retrospectively changed.

Automatic validation checks are carried out after records are uploaded.

**Disclosure**

There are no issues regarding disclosure.

**Further information**

For information on progress towards this and related targets see *Waiting times for cancer. Progress, lessons learned and next steps* (Department of Health, 2006).

For further information on the annual health check see Care Quality Commission.

**References**


Health and Social Care Information Centre

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