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NSW hospitals reduce elective surgery waiting times

NSW Minister for Health John Della Bosca today released a quarterly report on the performance of the State's public hospitals and congratulated doctors, nurses and allied health staff on their achievements.

“NSW public hospitals lead the nation in both emergency department performance and elective surgery,” Mr Della Bosca said.

“This latest data shows our hospitals are performing well, but it also identifies areas where there's room for improvement.

“In the three months to September, 91 per cent of elective surgery patients were treated within the recommended timeframes – a four per cent improvement over the same period last year.

“Emergency department admissions were up 2.7 per cent to 114,561 for the quarter.

“Our hospitals and their skilled personnel are responding to increasing demand from a growing and ageing population.

“They are doing a great job, under pressure.”

A recent AMA report card and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare ranked NSW as the number one jurisdiction in Australia for both emergency department and elective surgery performance. NSW is the only State to meet four of the five Australasian College for Emergency Medicine performance benchmarks.

“Elective surgery waiting times have decreased substantially and the number of patients now waiting longer than the desirable timeframe is consistently low,” Mr Della Bosca said.

“A few years ago, there were 10,000 people waiting longer than a year for non-urgent surgery. It's now around 250,” he said.

Figures released in the NSW Health Quarterly Performance Report July to September 2008 show:

- 93 per cent of Category 1 patients were admitted for elective surgery within 30 days
- 81 per cent of Category 2 patients were admitted for elective surgery within 90 days
- 96 per cent of Category 3 patients were admitted for elective surgery within 365 days

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The release of the Quarterly Performance Report also marks the first time that elective surgery median waiting times have been calculated and listed, alongside a retrospective breakdown of waiting times since October 2006.

Median waiting times for elective surgery in the NSW Health Quarterly Performance Report July to September 2008 are as follows:

- For Category 1 patients where it is desirable that admission occur within 30 days – the median time was 10 days
- For Category 2 patients where it is desirable that admission occur within 90 days – the median time was 49 days
- For Category 3 patients where it is desirable that admission occur within 365 days – the median time was 121 days

Mr Della Bosca said the data showed excellent overall performance and also identified areas where some hospitals needed to improve.

“In comparison with the performance just a few years ago, patients are spending much less time waiting for elective surgery,” he said.

“This not only immediately benefits the patient, but it also minimises the emergence of related chronic health problems,” he said.

NSW public hospitals at a glance:

From July to September 2008	For the same period last year	The difference
114,561 admissions from Emergency Departments	111,489 admissions	Up 2.7%
502,807 attendances at Emergency Departments	515,394 attendances	Down 2.5%
401,225 admitted patients	391,400 admitted patients	Up 2.5%
3.6 days average stay	3.7 days average stay	Down 2.7%
91% of elective surgery patients treated on time	87% treated on time	Up 4%
18,270 babies born	18,202 babies	Up 0.4%

Based on these figures, on average each day in NSW public hospitals:

- 5,465 people attend an Emergency Department
- 1,245 people are admitted from an Emergency Department
- 4,361 people are discharged from hospital
- 199 babies are born

“Measurable progress is being made in public hospital performance on all fronts. It’s important to commend all health care workers involved in getting people off the waiting list and into surgery,” Mr Della Bosca said.

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