

Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP

Shadow Secretary of State for Health

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Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE
UK Statistics Authority
1 Drummond Gate
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4th July 2014

Dear Sir Andrew

Prime Minister's statements on average waiting times in Accident and Emergency

I am writing to seek clarification about recent claims by the Prime Minister about waiting times in Accident and Emergency units in England. As you may be aware, on 2 July the Prime Minister informed the House of Commons that average A&E waiting times had fallen from 77 minutes to 30 minutes.

"Let me tell the right hon. Gentleman exactly how long people are waiting. When the shadow Secretary of State was Secretary of State for Health, the average waiting time was 77 minutes; under this Government, it is 30 minutes."

David Cameron, Hansard, 2 July 2014, column 883

"The average waiting time is down by more than half. That is better."

David Cameron, Hansard; 2 July 2014, column 883

In addition, the Health Secretary informed the House of Commons on 9 June that "the median wait for an initial assessment is only 30 minutes under this Government, down from 77 minutes under the last Government."

"NHS staff are working incredibly hard to see and treat these patients within four hours, and it is a tribute to them that the median wait for an initial assessment is only 30 minutes under this Government, down from 77 minutes under the last Government."

Jeremy Hunt, Hansard, 9 June 2014, column 288

But the House of Commons Library, in a blog post that has since been removed, says that "total time in A&E has been steadily increasing" and that "The data does not show that the average time in A&E has fallen since 2008. Rather, the typical total time in A&E has risen". And they say that it is "false" to claim, as the Health Secretary did, that the median waiting

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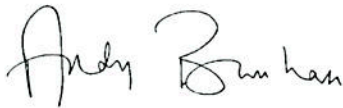
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time has fallen from 77 minutes, because "the median has remained more or less unchanged at around 10 minutes to initial assessment".

I would be very grateful if you could consider the accuracy of the Prime Minister's and Health Secretary's statements, and in particular to clarify whether "time to initial assessment" is an accurate indicator of "average waiting time" in A&E, and whether it is an accurate indicator of overall A&E performance.

Yours sincerely,



RT HON ANDY BURNHAM MP