
Director General for Regulation

Scott Heald
Head of Statistics
Information Services Division,
NHS National Services Scotland
(By email)

20 December 2017

Dear Scott

Thank you for keeping us informed about your work to address the data quality issues relating to Accident and Emergency waiting times in NHS Lothian. The situation at the moment is as follows:

- The recording of A&E waiting times in hospitals across NHS Lothian has not been consistent with the National Guidelines provided to ensure waiting times are captured accurately¹. This will impact mainly on the statistics for that area, but will also impact on national totals, and comparisons between regions.
- In recent weeks ISD has been working closely with NHS Lothian to investigate the above issue, but will need to conduct further analysis to understand the extent of the impact on A&E waiting time statistics. This step is particularly important in terms of offering reassurances to users about the statistics accurately answering the question at both the local and national level: how long are patients waiting for Accident and Emergency Services?

When the Statistics Authority designates statistics as National Statistics, this indicates to users that the statistics comply with the highest standards of trustworthiness, quality and public value. In the light of the concerns around data quality, I will arrange for my team to carry out a short review in the New Year of the extent to which these statistics continue to comply with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics.

I welcome your commitment to provide users with a clear statement about the situation in your forthcoming January 2018 publication, and your ongoing plans to address the quality concerns. This statement needs to make it clear how users should interpret and use the NHS Lothian figures, and should be included in related publications that include A&E waiting time data. I would be grateful if you would also highlight in this publication our commitment to undertake a short review, including a link to this letter.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation

¹www.nhslothian.scot.nhs.uk/OurOrganisation/BoardCommittees/LothianNHSBoard/BoardPapers/Lists/BoardPapers/LHB%20Papers%2006-12-17.pdf