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NHS waiting times fall in Bristol

Patients in Bristol have benefited from a dramatic fall in waiting times for treatment.

Hospital waiting times in the South West are amongst the shortest in the country. In Bristol both University Hospitals Bristol NHS Foundation Trust (UH Bristol) and North Bristol NHS Trust have worked very hard to bring down waiting times. At least 90% of patients who need to stay in hospital and 95% of patients who have treatment without a hospital stay are seen within just 18 weeks from GP referral.

Local GP Will Warin said: *"It is a good feeling to be able to tell my patients they will have their outpatient appointments, diagnostics, and treatment in such a short time.*

"Compared with the situation a year ago, waiting times have improved dramatically. And as we know, the earlier treatment starts, the better the outcome for patients, and the better the patient experience."

To help reduce hospital waiting times, the local hospital trusts have identified ways of offering outpatient appointments sooner and speeding up diagnostic tests.

UH Bristol has found ways to speed up diagnostic tests and changed the way some clinics are run in order to achieve the 18 week target. For example:

* A one-stop clinic has been set-up for patients referred with possible heart conditions. Many patients now have any diagnostic tests they need on the same day they see a specialist, thereby cutting out unnecessary waits for tests and visits to hospital.

* Patients referred for minor eye operations now have their procedure performed in an outpatient clinic. This has improved patient experience and has freed up theatre time so that waiting times for other patients requiring more complex eye surgery can be reduced.

* Waiting times for most of the steps in a patient's pathway have reduced. More than 90% of patients now wait less than 11 weeks for surgery once it has been agreed they need an operation. This has allowed UH Bristol to shorten overall waiting times from referral to treatment.

UH Bristol's Chief Operating Officer Irene Scott says: "This achievement is due to the hard work and dedication of staff across the Trust wanting to deliver excellent care to patients. They have risen to the challenge of meeting this target early and will continue to strive to reduce the time our patients have to wait."

Meanwhile, North Bristol NHS Trust has changed the way some departments work – offering a more flexible way of working. Examples of this include operating into the evening and weekends to see more patients quicker, and significantly investing in more staff in the most challenged areas.

Ruth Brunt, director of operations at North Bristol NHS Trust, said: *"Reducing waiting times has, in many cases, meant a complete redesign of the traditional patient pathway. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of our staff we have made excellent progress in reducing waits and we look forward to further reducing waits in the future."*

Successful pilot projects have so far included more tonsils taken out as day cases, a new service where GPs can refer patients needing a hernia operation straight onto the operating list, and an accelerated pathway for patients needing gallstones removed.

Both trusts are continuing to work towards further reducing hospital waits and expect to see these continue to fall across all their services. Currently at NBT no patient has to wait more than six weeks for a scan or X-ray and the trust is on track to achieve a two week waiting time target for these services by the end of the year.

Ends

For further information contact Julie Hendry, Bristol PCT, tel 0117 900 2549