

# Talk about:

## Noble politicians

nhs managers exclusive

Since April, when data showed that the admitted patients target had been breached nationally for the first time since 2011, NHS England have been telling everyone to expect further breaches as the NHS clears its backlogs over the summer.

Last week's figures duly showed another breach, but there was no sign of the backlog being cleared. Instead, it looks like a waiting list that is simply too big, where you get long waits just for keeping it ticking over. This is the 'all pain but no gain' stage.

There is some money coming down the system to pay for a good old fashioned waiting list initiative, and the effects should show up in the data for July and August (to be published in September and October). So what should we look for when those figures come out?

First, we want to see more patients being admitted, to hold down the overall list size. Although staff are on their summer holidays, the physical theatres and beds are still there, so with locums and bank it may be possible to do the extra work (albeit at a price). The capacity doesn't need to be sweated, we just need to see more work done than in a normal July and August.

Second, we want to see fewer long-waiters left on the list. Measures like over-18-week waiters and 92nd centile waits should come down sharply.

Third, the longest-waiting services should improve the most, and fewer should end up breaching the incomplete pathways target. Both are important: you could achieve the latter by targeting just the borderline breaches, but that would be an abandonment of the longest-waiting patients.

What if there isn't quite enough improvement to really clinch it? We would then be heading into September in a similar position to now, with a waiting list that's just too big to sustain the admitted patient target.

Then we'd find out what the Health Secretary is really made of.

Would he treat the long-waiters, even if that meant failing the target as an Election approaches? Or would he insist that all targets are met, regardless of those patients left stranded the wrong side of 18 weeks?

Well, I'm a cynic too. But even politicians can surprise us with noble deeds. And we can all help them do the right thing by giving credit when it's due.



Comment from Rob Findlay at Gooroo

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Read Rob's analysis of the 18-week stats now at [hsj.co.uk/comment](http://hsj.co.uk/comment)

or from Monday get the un-paywalled version at [blog.gooroo.co.uk](http://blog.gooroo.co.uk)

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