

Cancer referral targets missed for a whole year

February 19 2015



Targets to treat patients referred with suspected cancer were missed during every quarter of the last year, [latest NHS England figures](#) show.

According to government [guidelines](#), the NHS in England aims to treat at least 85 per cent of [patients](#) within 62 days of being referred by a GP with suspected cancer.

But only 83.8 per cent did so during the period from October to

December.

This was a slight increase on the 83.5 per cent seen during the previous three months, but means that the target was missed during the all four quarters of 2014.

Sarah Woolnough, Cancer Research UK's executive director of policy and information, said that patients were being failed, despite the recent small improvement being "encouraging".

"The 62 day target for [cancer treatment](#) hasn't been met for a full 12 months. This isn't just about missed targets – consecutive breaches mean thousands of patients are being failed.

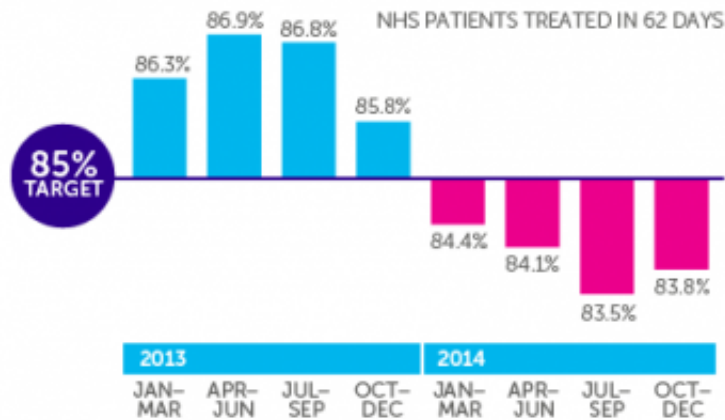
"These targets exist to ensure swift diagnosis of cancer and access to treatment, which is vital if we're serious about having the best survival rates in the world.

"Patients need the confidence that cancer is being taken seriously and prioritised by the NHS," she added.

Woolnough called for urgent action to support the NHS, and for an end to the breaches in waiting time standards.

Sean Duffy, NHS England's national clinical director for cancer, said it was crucial to maintain the focus on waiting time standards as demand for services, driven by an ageing population, increases.

CANCER REFERRAL TARGET HAS BEEN MISSED FOR AN ENTIRE YEAR



In England, the NHS aims to treat **85% of patients in 62 days** from being referred by a GP.

For the last year, this target has been missed.

UK cancer survival doubled in the last 40 years. If we want this to continue, the NHS needs **urgent support**.

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"We are closely scrutinising these figures to pinpoint any issues on the ground," he said.

"We have also created an independent taskforce to develop a plan to improve prevention, diagnosis and treatment over the next five years, with the aim of saving thousands more lives."

The independent taskforce will be chaired by Cancer Research UK's chief executive, Harpal Kumar.



Labour's shadow health secretary Andy Burnham said the failure to meet the two-month target for the fourth quarter in a row was a "scandal".

"David Cameron cut the cancer budget by £800 million in real terms and, despite all the warnings, he persisted with an NHS reorganisation that disrupted [cancer](#) services," he said.

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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