

Cancer waiting time targets – simply not good enough

May 25 2015, by Heather Walker

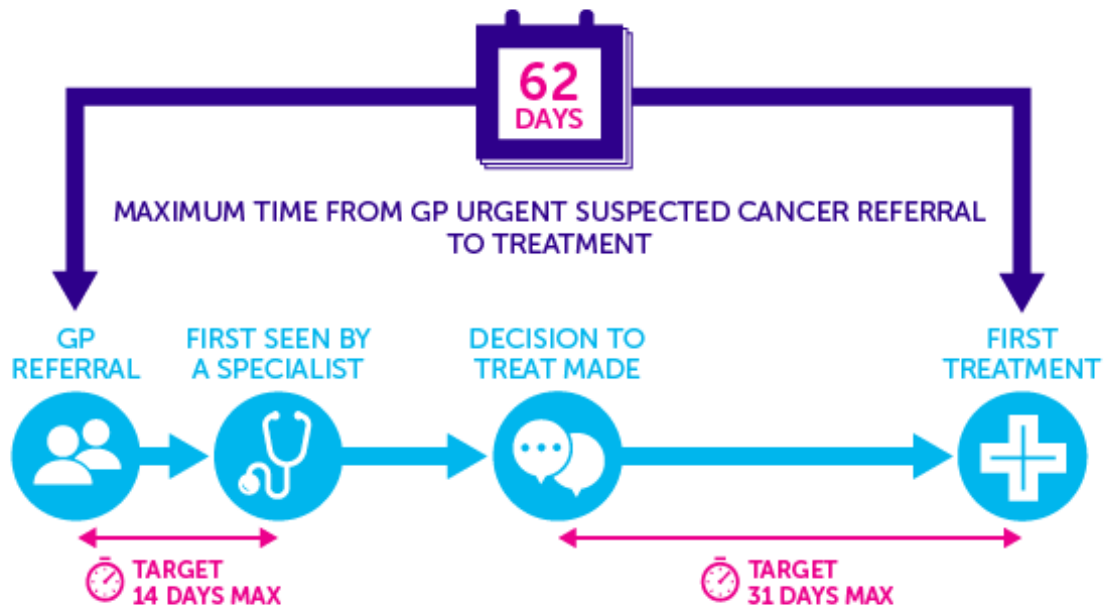


We've known for some time that NHS cancer services are at a tipping point.

And over the last year, the NHS in England has failed to meet one of its key cancer targets: that 85 per cent of patients should start treatment within 62 days of being urgently referred by a GP (known as the '62 day

wait', see graphic):

THE 62 DAY WAITING TARGET



The NHS in Wales has been having similar problems, although their target is higher – 95 per cent.

The last time England's figures were published, back in February, the target had again been missed, but there had seemed to be a small improvement.

So this morning, we waited for the new quarterly cancer waiting times figures with some anxiety.

And they don't make for happy reading.

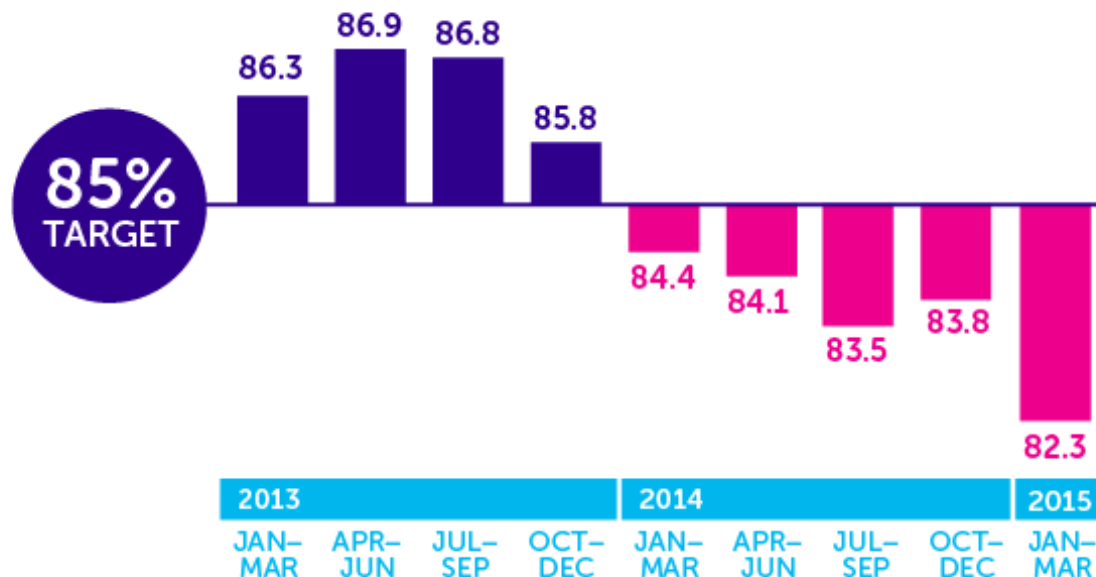
A record low

Today's new figures for England show an even bigger decline. Almost half of all NHS trusts are now missing the 62 day wait target.

The target has been missed by the biggest margin since the data were first collected in 2009:

ENGLAND MISSES ITS CANCER REFERRAL TARGET AGAIN

RECORD LOW % OF NHS CANCER PATIENTS IN ENGLAND STARTED TREATMENT IN 62 DAYS

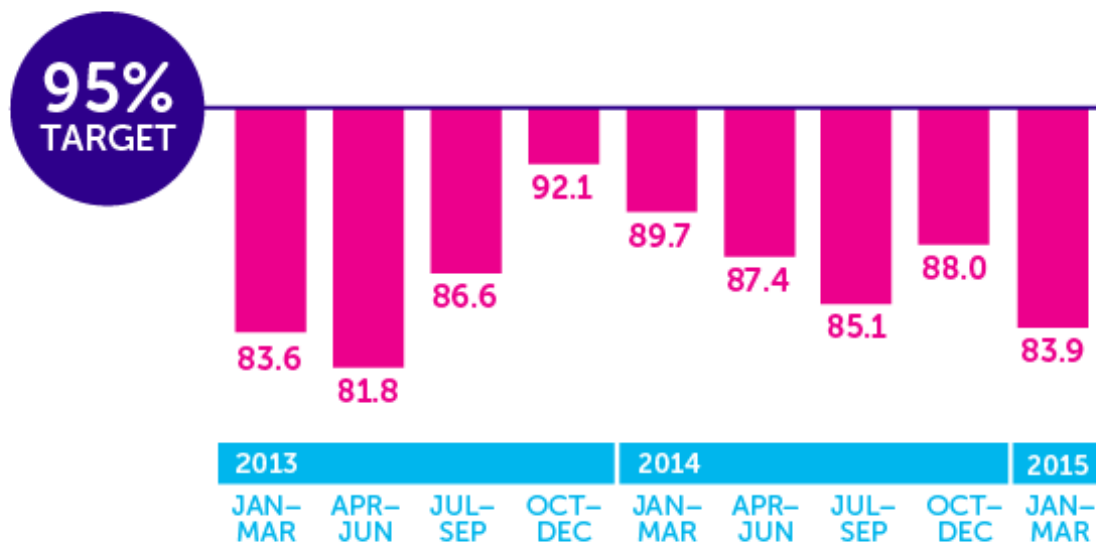


But the problems don't stop there.

We are also seeing a similar picture in today's figures from Wales: a substantial low of 83.9 per cent, following a fairly consistent decline since early 2014:

WALES MISSES ITS CANCER REFERRAL TARGET AGAIN

% OF NHS CANCER PATIENTS IN WALES STARTED TREATMENT IN 62 DAYS



Neither Scotland or Northern Ireland published new figures today, but both have recently missed their 95 per cent 62-day-wait targets, although Scotland only by a whisker.

Not about targets

But this isn't really about NHS targets. It's about patients being let down. Over the last three months, nearly 6,000 people have had to wait longer than they should for [cancer treatment](#).

The 62 day wait exists to make sure patients are tested, diagnosed and treated quickly after seeing their GP with suspected cancer. Swift diagnosis and access to treatment are absolutely vital to patient outcomes – as the more advanced a cancer is, the harder it is to treat.

That's not to mention the psychological impact of waiting a long time for test results or treatment to begin – it adds extra anxiety for patients when they may already be at their most vulnerable.

People want confidence that suspected cancer is taken seriously, and prioritised by the NHS. These breaches have become a trend, and they are worsening.

It is simply not good enough. The UK's cancer survival rates lag behind comparable countries, and if we are serious about improving them, urgent action needs to be taken.

Services need to be adequately resourced to cope with rising demand –

something that we have been calling for for some time.

England's new cancer strategy is currently being written – this needs to set out a robust plan for immediate action to ensure [cancer patients](#) aren't being let down.

And we need similar action across all the UK nations to make sure no [patients](#) are left waiting at any point in the [cancer](#) pathway.

This shocking situation should not be allowed to continue.

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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