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To: SHA Chief Executives

Cc: All NHS Chief Executives

Dear Colleague

Waiting times

RTT Performance

Waiting times are an important factor in the overall perception of patients and their experience of the care that they receive. The commitment to ensure patients receive treatment within 18 weeks of referral is embedded in the NHS Constitution and is a fundamental part of the NHS Contract. The Government has recently reinforced this commitment. I have personally stressed the need to maintain delivery of RTT through the meetings that were held with you to "sign off" plans for 2011/12. There can, be no doubt about the importance of delivering improved performance on waiting times, particularly for admitted patients.

Against this background, it is unacceptable for performance to fall below the expected standards as it did in February and March 2011. Performance has subsequently improved for April 2011. However, 47 organisations failed to meet the 90% standard for admitted patients and of these, 12 also failed to meet the standard for non-admitted patients. Recovery plans for the worst performing organisations were requested during the recent planning round. We will be engaging with each SHA team in monitoring the compliance with agreed actions to get performance back on track. In the meanwhile, I expect local support to be made available; contract levers to be applied in a robust way and for swift intervention where the necessary progress is not being made.

A&E Performance

Waiting times in A&E continue to have the same level of importance regardless of the change in the standard from 98% to 95%. From April 2011 a new set of A&E clinical quality indicators were introduced. These are set out in Alan Hall's letter of 23 June (Gateway reference 16204). While these indicators cover a broader range of performance, waiting time remains a key measure and too many organisations are failing to meet the required standard. In week ending 19 June there were 19 trusts with performance below 94% on the quarter to date performance, and a further 13 organisations between 94 and 95%. At this time of year, we would have expected performance to be well above 98% in advance of the pressures we will undoubtedly face over the winter months.

As with RTT, I expect the same level of attention to be focussed on organisations that are failing to meet the required standards.

Yours Sincerely,

David Flory.

David Flory
Deputy NHS Chief Executive