

Hospitals 'send patients home too soon'

The *Daily Telegraph* reports on new figures showing that the rate of emergency readmissions has risen dramatically in the past four years. Andrew Lansley, shadow health secretary, said: *"On the face of it, hospitals may be discharging patients sooner than they should be, resulting in a greater risk of emergency readmission. High bed occupancy rates and the government's push to achieve waiting time targets may be responsible for compromising patient safety in this way."* Nigel Edwards of the NHS Confederation said there could be several reasons for the increase: *"The first difficulty is that we have no information on what an acceptable emergency readmission rate is. If there were no readmissions it would also mean that some people were being detained in hospital longer than they need to be and that is not a good thing either...Another possibility is that some are being discharged too soon to meet targets. This could have something to do with the need to clear beds so that new patients can be admitted from A&E to meet the four hour target."*

Daily Telegraph 8th August 2006

NHS hospital penalised for "treating patients too quickly"

The *Daily Telegraph* reports that Ipswich Hospital has been penalised for *"treating its patients too quickly"* - losing nearly £2.5 million, the cost of the care it provided outside the agreed contract. Suffolk East Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) has introduced a minimum wait for patients to manage demand, requiring them to wait 122 days before seeing a consultant. A spokesperson for the PCT said that they wanted a system that was fair to all patients and that worked within the budget. A spokesperson for Ipswich Hospital, said that no-one needing urgent or emergency treatment had been affected by the rule. Nigel Edwards, director of policy at the NHS Confederation, said he expected more minimum waiting times to be set as hospitals worked through their waiting list backlogs, allowing them to see new patients more quickly. He said: *"I think we will see the emergence of maximum and minimum waiting times."*

Daily Telegraph 2nd August 2006

Star ratings caused NHS financial problems, says new study

Research published today by the National Institute for Economic and Social Research suggests that NHS deficits can be largely traced to the star ratings system used to assess the performance of NHS trusts. Report author, Gwyn Bevan, said: *"The scoring system of star ratings meant that an organisation could do appallingly badly on one key target only and not-be zero-rated. Thus, an NHS organisation could aim to avoid being zero-rated by spending its way out of trouble, running up a massive deficit, and fail on one key target of maintaining a financial balance."*

Daily Telegraph - 27th July 2006