

Impact of Covid-19 on Hospital Waiting Times

POSITION AT 31st October 2020

Introduction

The Department of Health publish quarterly statistical reports and tables on Hospital Waiting Times and an annual report and tables on Outpatient Activity. This publication aims to show the early impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on services, and highlights the provisional Inpatient, Outpatient and Cancer Waiting Times positions for 31st October 2019 and 31st October 2020. It also provides data on Outpatient activity and referrals for the quarters ending September 2019 and September 2020.

This management information (MI) has been drawn from data extracts from the Patient Administration System (PAS), Departmental Returns and Cancer Patient Pathway System (CaPPS) at a point in time and has not been quality assured or processed to the standards required to be official statistics. In addition, this information is provisional and has not been derived to the same methodology as the National Statistics published quarterly so will not be directly comparable. However, similar principles have been applied. The data presented excludes a small number of medical specialties which are not captured on PAS.

Outpatient Waiting Times

It should be noted that Outpatient figures are provisional and exclude a small number of patients not recorded on the Patient Administration System.

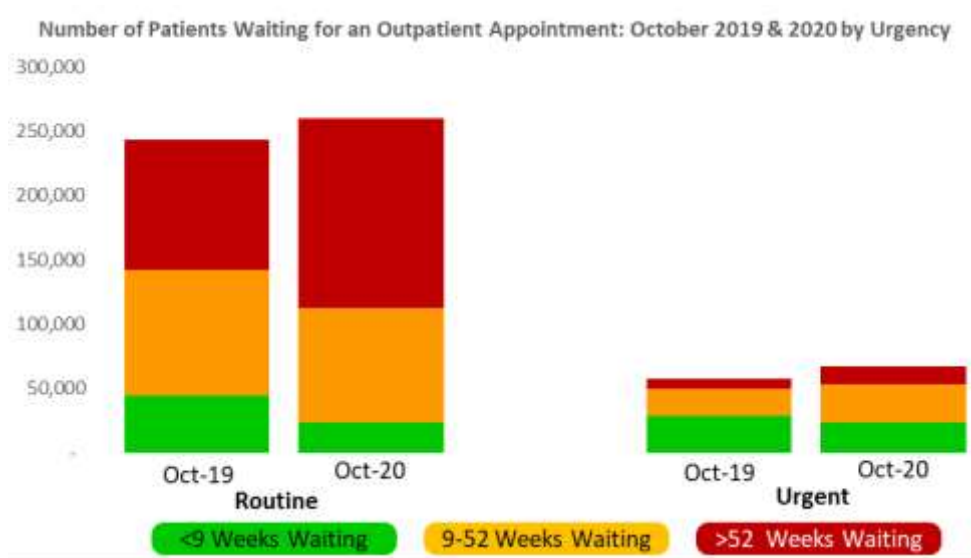
Total Waiting

The number of patients waiting for an outpatient appointment at 31st October 2020 (327,190) was 8.7% (26,147) higher than at the same point last year (301,043). This was comprised of a decrease of 32.2% (23,619) in the number of patients waiting less than 9 weeks, a 3.2% (3,810) decrease in the number of patients waiting between 9 and 52 weeks, and a 49.4% (53,576) increase in the number waiting over 52 weeks.

Month	Total Waiting	Waiting > 9 weeks	Waiting > 52 weeks
Oct 2019	301,043	227,667	108,414
Oct 2020	327,190	277,433	161,990

By Urgency

At 31st October 2020, 66,871 (20%) patients were waiting for an urgent appointment, with the remaining 260,319 waiting for a routine appointment. This is compared with 57,829 patients waiting for an urgent appointment and 243,214 waiting for a routine appointment in October 2019.

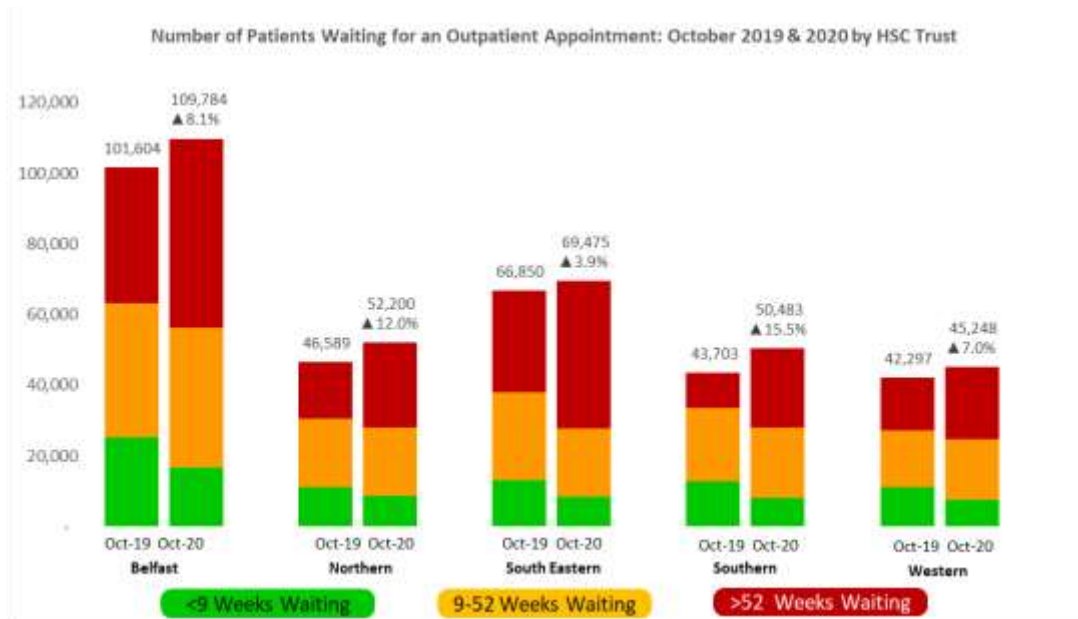


The number of patients waiting more than 9 weeks for a routine appointment increased by 17.8% (35,416), compared to an increase of 49.9% (14,350) among patients waiting over 9 weeks for an urgent appointment.

There were 47.4% (47,641) more patients waiting over 52 weeks for a routine appointment, and an increase of three-quarters (74.6%, 5,935) waiting more than 52 weeks for an urgent appointment.

By Trust

Waiting lists in all HSC Trusts increased between October 2019 and October 2020.

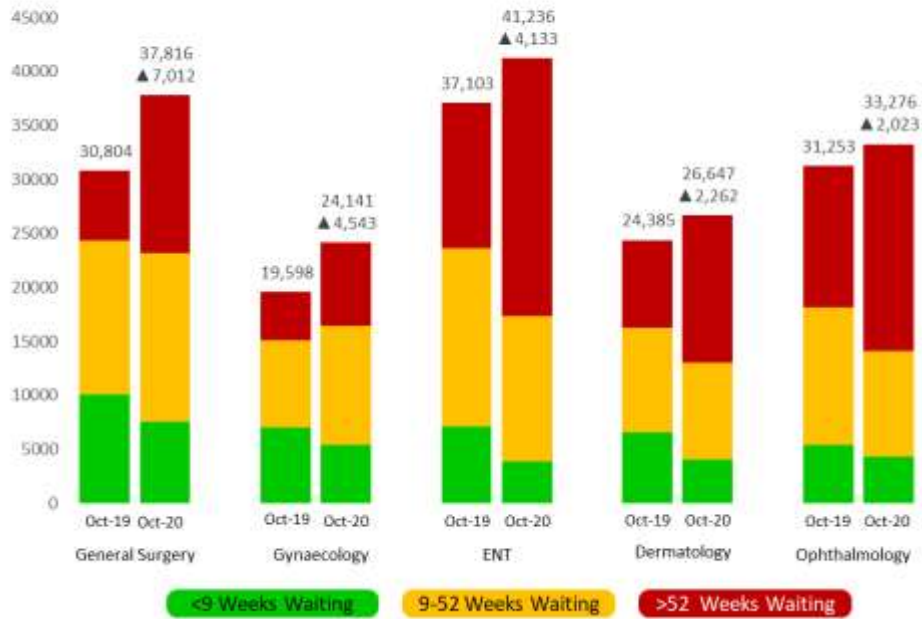


Across all HSC Trusts, the number of patients waiting less than 9 weeks in October 2020 decreased considerably from October 2019, whilst across the same period, the number waiting over 52 weeks increased in all HSC Trusts.

Specialties with Largest Increases in Number of Patients Waiting

There were 37,816 patients waiting for General Surgery in October 2020, an increase of 7,012 (22.8%) from October 2019 (30,804). This was the largest increase across this period of any specialty. Gynaecology, ENT, Dermatology and Ophthalmology also showed large increases across this period.

**Number of Patients Waiting for an Outpatient Appointment:
 October 2019 & 2020 - Specialties With Largest Increases**



Outpatient Referrals

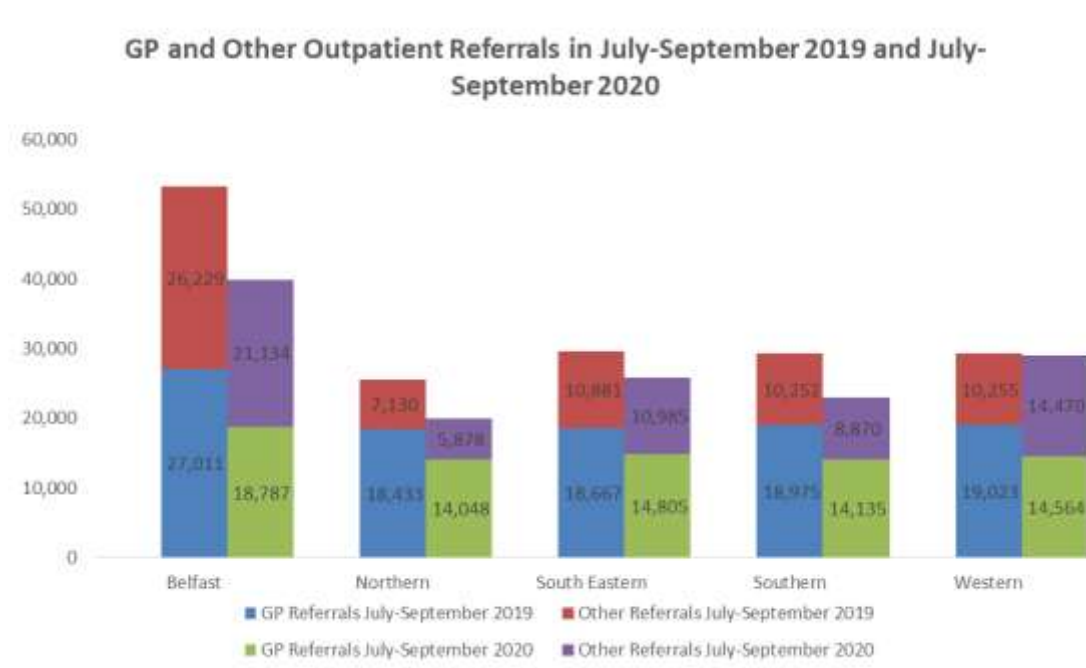
Total Referrals

The number of outpatient referrals during July, August and September (137,676) was 17% less than the number of referrals made during the same quarter last year (166,856). This was comprised of a decrease of 25% (25,770) in the number of GP referrals and a 5% (3,410) decrease in the number of other referrals.

Quarter	Total Referrals	GP Referrals	Other Referrals
September 2019	166,856	102,109	64,747
September 2020	137,676	76,339	61,337

By Trust

A decrease in the number of referrals was observed in all HSC Trusts, however, this difference was greatest in the Belfast Trust where the number of referrals fell by 25% (13,319).



Outpatient Activity

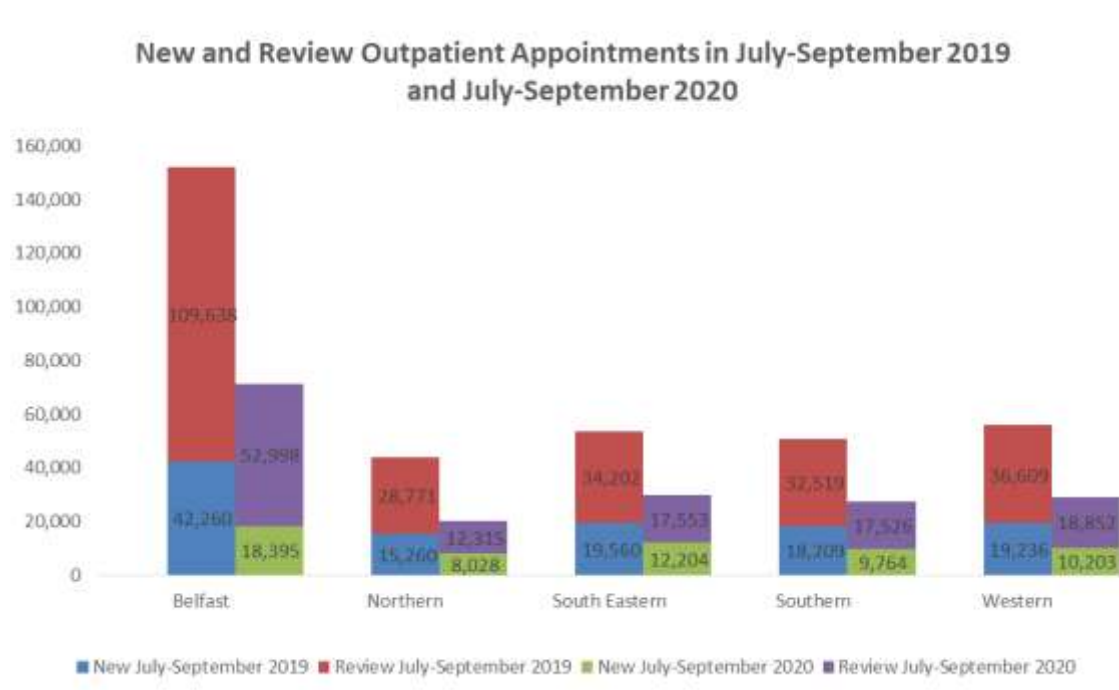
Total Activity

The number of outpatient appointments that took place during July, August and September (177,838) was 50% less than the number which took place during the same quarter last year (356,264). This was comprised of a decrease of 49% (55,931) in the number of new appointments and a 51% (122,495) decrease in the number of review appointments. These do not include virtual outpatient appointments.

Quarter	Total Appointments	New Appointments	Review Appointments
September 2019	356,264	114,525	241,739
September 2020	177,838	58,594	119,244

By Trust

A decrease in the number of referrals was observed in all HSC Trusts.



Virtual Outpatient Activity

Total Activity

The number of virtual outpatient appointments that took place during July, August and September 2020 (101,099) was more than ten times the number which took place during the same quarter last year (9,901). This was comprised of an increase of 14,614 in the number of new virtual appointments, and 76,584 more review virtual appointments.

Quarter	Total Appointments	New Appointments	Review Appointments
September 2019	9,901	7,618	2,283
September 2020	101,099	22,232	78,867

By Trust

The number of virtual appointments increased in all HSC Trusts, with the largest proportionate increase observed in the Northern HSC Trust, with more than 27 times as many virtual appointments in the quarter ending September 2020 (16,003) compared with the same quarter in 2019 (579).

Virtual Outpatient Appointments in July-September 2019 and July-September 2020



Inpatient Waiting Times

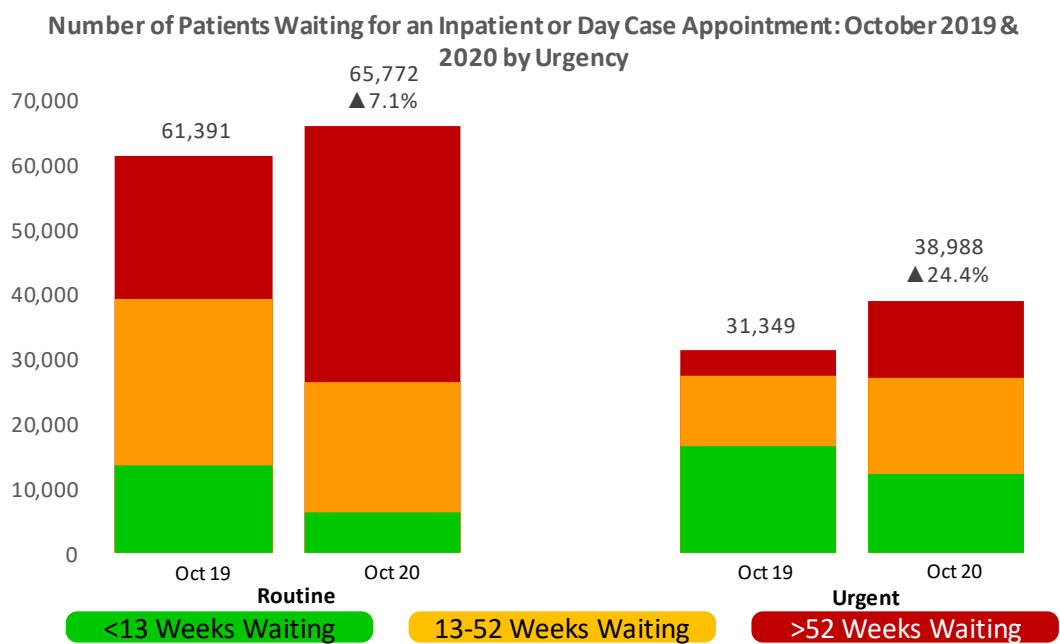
Total Waiting

The number of patients waiting for an inpatient or day case appointment at 31st October 2020 (104,760) was 13.0% (12,020) higher than the same period last year (92,740).

	Total Waiting	Waiting > 13 weeks	Waiting > 52 weeks
October 19	92,740	62,621	26,298
October 20	104,760	86,369	51,200
Difference	▲ 12,020 (13.0%)	▲ 23,748 (37.9%)	▲ 24,902 (94.7%)

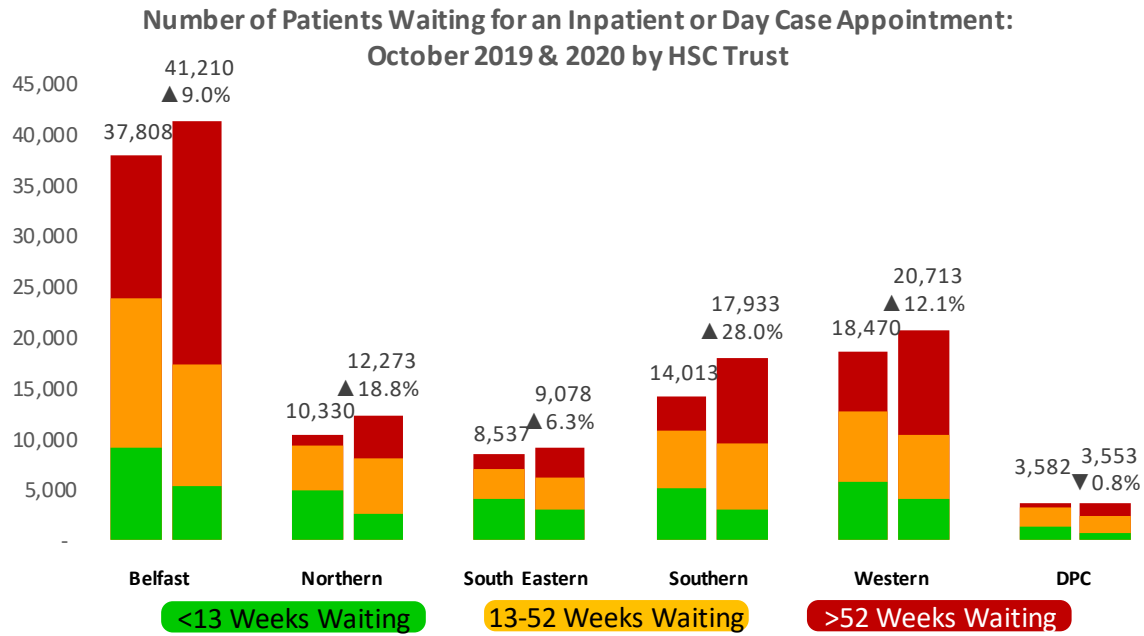
By Urgency

The number of patients awaiting urgent appointments increased by 7,639 (24.4%), accounting for 63.6% of the total increase. A further increase of 4,381 (7.1%) patients was seen in the waiting list for routine appointments.



By Trust

Between October 2019 and October 2020, the Southern HSC Trust waiting list increased by 28.0% (3,920). Across the same period there was an increase of 18.8% (1,943) in the number waiting in the Northern HSC Trust and 12.1% (2,243) in the Western HSC Trust, while the Belfast and South Eastern HSC Trust waiting lists increased by less than 10%. There were a similar number of patients waiting at a Day Case Procedure Centre (DPC) in October 2020 compared with October 2019.



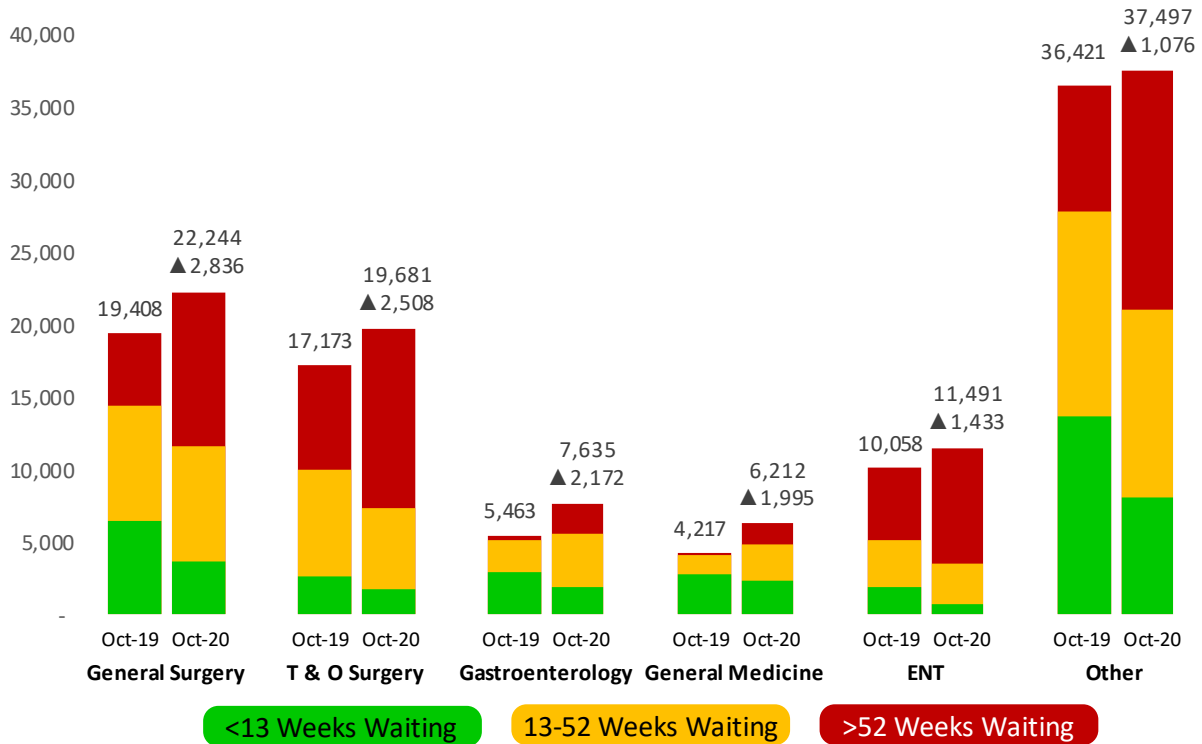
The number of patients waiting more than 13 weeks increased by over four-fifths in the Northern HSC Trust (an increase of 81.0%, 4,397 patients). The number waiting over 13 weeks in the Southern HSC Trust increased by over two-thirds (68.5%, 6,088), the South Eastern HSC Trust increased by almost two-fifths (38.0%, 1,700), the Western HSC Trust by almost a third (32.1%, 4,067) and the Belfast HSC Trust by a quarter (24.5%, 7,056).

There were 18.7% (440) more patients waiting over 13 weeks at a Day Case Procedure Centre (DPC) in October 2020 compared with October 2019.

Specialties with Largest Increases to Waiting Lists

There were 22,244 patients waiting for General Surgery in October 2020, an increase of 2,836 (12.7%) from October 2019 (19,408). This was the largest proportional across this period of any specialty. T&O Surgery, Gastroenterology, General Medicine and ENT also showed large increases across this period.

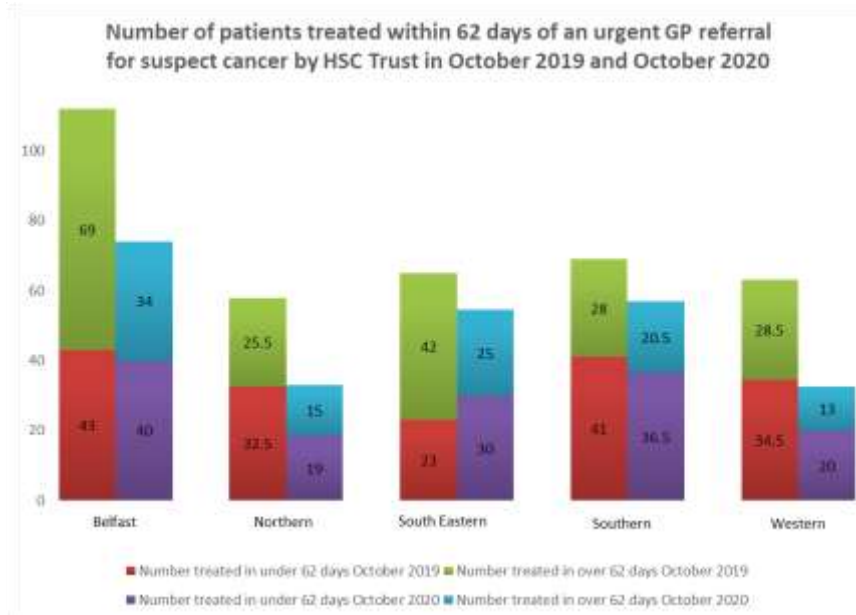
**Number of Patients Waiting for an Inpatient or Day Case Appointment:
 October 2019 & 2020 - Specialties With Largest Increases**



Cancer

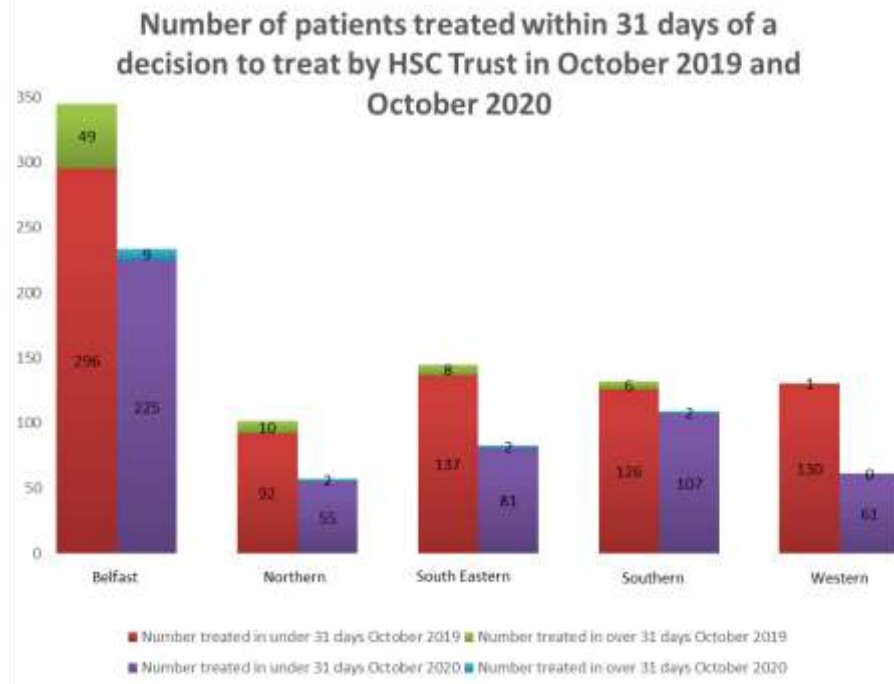
62 day Ministerial Target

There was a decrease of 32% in the number of patients who started treatment following an urgent GP referral in October 2020 (251) compared with October 2019 (367), with the percentage seen within the target of 62 days increasing from 47.4% to 57.8% during the same period. However, this should be viewed in the context of the decrease in the number of patients who began treatment.



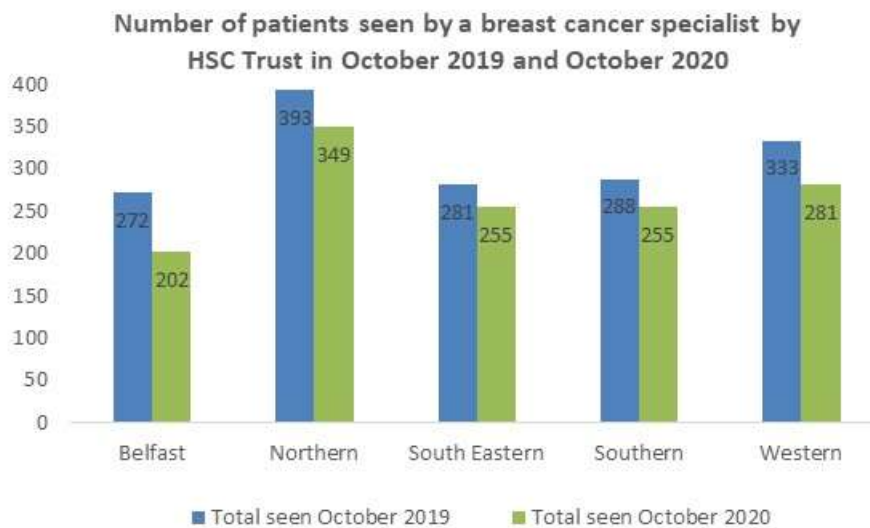
31 day Ministerial Target

There has been a decrease in the number of patients who started treatment within 31 days following a decision to treat. In October 2020, 529 out of 544 (97.2%) started treatment within 31 days, compared with 781 out of 855 (91.3%) in October 2019. The number of patients who began treatment within 31 days decreased between 2019 and 2020 in all HSC Trusts.



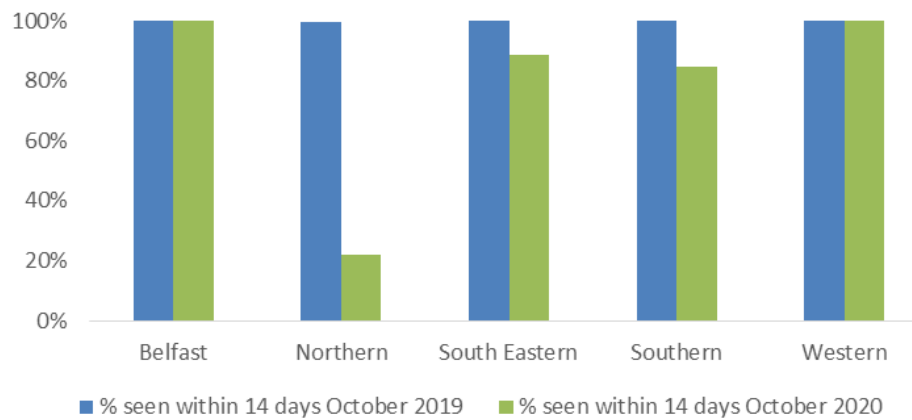
14 day Ministerial Target

In October 2020, 1,342 patients were seen by a breast cancer specialist following an urgent referral for suspect breast cancer, a decrease of 14% on the 1,567 seen in October 2019. A reduction in the number of patients seen by a breast cancer specialist during this period was observed in all HSC Trusts.



The percentage of patients seen within the target of 14 days decreased, from 99.9% to 74.7%, with this decrease largely attributable to the Northern HSC Trust.

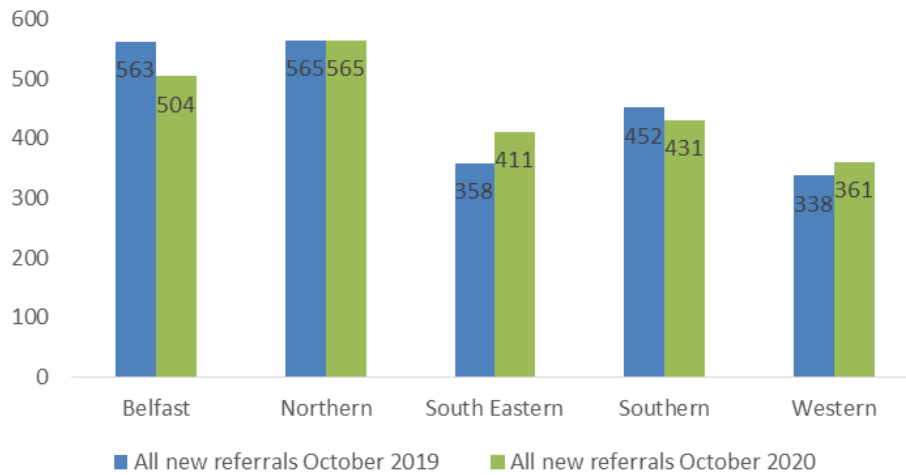
Percentage of patients seen within 14 days of an urgent referral for suspect breast cancer by HSC Trust in October 2019 and October 2020



Breast Cancer Referrals

There were a similar number of new breast cancer referrals in October 2020 (2,272) and October 2019 (2,276). Within this, urgent breast cancer referrals saw an increase from 1,564 in October 2019 to 1,693 in October 2020.

Number of new referrals for suspect breast cancer by HSC Trust in October 2019 and October 2020



Belfast HSC Trust reported a slight decrease in the number of urgent breast cancer referrals in October 2020 when compared with October 2019, while all other HSC Trusts reported an increase in the same period.

Number of new urgent referrals for suspect breast cancer by HSC Trust in October 2019 and October 2020

