

Patients face two-year wait for new knees and hips

Surgeons have a backlog of 1.5 million operations, with cancer, heart and lung patients joining the list of those affected

Andrew Gregory Health Editor

Hospitals have postponed 1.5 million operations because of the coronavirus pandemic, according to an analysis that shows the true scale of the backlog engulfing the NHS.

Patients may be forced to wait up to two years for surgery, with those needing a new hip or knee left in agony and those with cancer or heart and respiratory conditions forced to wait longer for treatment. The number of people having to wait more than a year to start hospital treatment in England jumped to 26,029 in May, up from 1,032 in the same month last year. It is the highest number for any month in more than a decade.

Dr Chaand Nagpaul, chairman of the British Medical Association (BMA), said the figures showed “the huge mountain we have to climb” to resume routine care for patients. In April, May and June this year a total of 1.5m operations were dropped, according to the analysis published today by the BMA. There were also 274,000 fewer urgent cancer referrals.

Professor Neil Mortensen, president of the Royal College of Surgeons of England, said: “We have been concerned since the start of this pandemic that suspending elective surgery for a period of months placed a timebomb under what was already a crisis in NHS waiting times.

“That timebomb has now detonated, with the numbers of those waiting more than a year for treatment spiralling out of control.”

Nagpaul called on the government to be “transparent” with the public about the scale of the damage inflicted on NHS waiting lists and urgently draw up plans to enable the health service to tackle the backlog. “Huge numbers of patients have suffered greatly because of disruption and lack of access to care throughout this pandemic,” he said.



Lisa Hitch's hip replacement has been cancelled three times since last May



Chaand Nagpaul: 'huge mountain we have to climb' to resume routine care

Health policy experts say that the NHS will need to revolutionise how and when it provides care. That could include increasing the amount of surgery done at evenings and weekends.

Siva Anandaciva, chief analyst at the King's Fund health think tank, said: “One

option is to extend the working day by scheduling more elective procedures in the evenings and weekends. Temporary staff brought in during the pandemic, such as retirees, could be kept on to boost staff numbers and share the burden of dealing with the huge backlog of demand for NHS care.”

Lisa Hitch, 49, from Letchworth, Hertfordshire, who was diagnosed with osteoarthritis in her twenties, has been waiting for a hip replacement operation since May last year, when she was first put on the NHS waiting list.

Her operation was due in January, but was cancelled because of staff shortages. It was rearranged for the end of January, but then cancelled again. She was rescheduled for March 24, but it was cancelled because of the lockdown. She has not been told when it will happen.

Hitch, who until last year was a regular gym-goer, said she was living with “excruciating” pain. Waiting 14 months for her operation had left her feeling “paralysed”, she said.

“Arthritis has really affected my personal relationships – not just my everyday life. I’ve been single for a fairly long time now as I don’t want to be a burden to anyone. The pain in my hip causes me to walk like a penguin, which has massively affected my self-confidence. I just want to get a date in the diary so I can get on with my life,” she said.

Liam O’Toole, chief executive of the Versus Arthritis charity, said: “Waiting lists were already an issue before the pandemic, with some waiting over a year – and the shutdown in services means the backlog is now even greater.”

The total number of people waiting longer than 18 weeks for hospital treatment in England is almost 1.45m, figures show. This is more than double the number in May last year (576,237) and the highest number for any calendar month since December 2007.

The NHS said that while responding “rapidly” to the pandemic, staff had also provided more than five million urgent tests, checks and treatment at the height of the crisis.

It added: “Local health services continue work to expand services safely.” @AndrewGregory

ALAMY



After reports that Scottish livestock was transported for 70 hours to be slaughtered, P&O outlawed export outside the UK

P&O ‘hoodwinked’ into breach of its own animal export policy

Mark Macaskill

Animal rights campaigners claim that P&O, one of Europe’s largest ferry operators, has been “hoodwinked”, as they uncover evidence that it unwittingly aided the export of Scottish sheep to the Republic of Ireland.

This would be a breach of its own policy. P&O was under the impression that animals ferried on its vessels between Cairnryan on the Ayrshire coast and Larne in Northern Ireland would remain within the UK.

It said this weekend that an investigation is under way into evidence that its policy has been breached after the UK government’s Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) disclosed that hundreds of

sheep sent from Cairnryan to Larne this year were destined for the Republic of Ireland.

Some consignments, according to APHA records, were for “fattening” sheep, which would most probably have been killed for meat. P&O tightened its policy on live exports in 2018 after it emerged that Scottish calves were sent on 70-hour journeys to Spain – via the Republic – for fattening and slaughter.

There is no evidence that sheep from Scotland follow a similar route but P&O launched an investigation after this newspaper highlighted breaches of its policy two weeks ago.

Details emerged after animal welfare campaigners acquired journey logs from APHA under freedom of

information. These revealed that between January 1 and April 22, there were 18 consignments of sheep exported from Scotland to the Republic. Five of these were for “fattening” which suggests the animals were destined to be killed for meat.

“I have a great amount of respect for P&O and their policy on live exports but it would seem they have been hoodwinked and run a booking system that is not robust enough to enforce their own policy,” said Nicola Glen from Eyes On Animals, an animal welfare group.

A spokesman for P&O said that it places “the highest priority” on animal welfare across all of its routes and pointed out that the company and the government rely on “the truthfulness” of

certifications that are issued to livestock transporters.

“We will not hesitate to act decisively and close the account of any customer in breach of our policy,” he added. “We do not import or export any livestock intended for fattening or slaughter other than on our Larne-Cairnryan route where the livestock is to remain within the UK.

“We are co-operating fully with animal welfare groups that have evidence of our policy being breached and we are investigating all the evidence received and liaising with relevant authorities.

“We will continue to co-operate with the authorities and Eyes on Animals and do everything we can to investigate any further information they provide.”

O’Brien ‘found peace’, says Holloway

Keith O’Brien, the late Scottish cardinal who fell from grace after being accused of sexual misconduct against priests, “found peace” before his death, writes Mark Macaskill.

Richard Holloway, a former bishop of Edinburgh, revealed that he had “a sweet correspondence” with O’Brien, who stepped down as archbishop in February 2013 after allegations that he had abused his power and

engaged in inappropriate and predatory sexual conduct with priests and seminarians under his jurisdiction.

He later apologised after three priests and one former priest alleged improper conduct dating to the 1980s.

O’Brien died in 2018, two days after his 80th birthday, after a fall at his home in northern England.

“I think he had reconciled himself,” said Holloway, who was primus of the Scottish

Episcopal Church between 1992 and 2000. “I sent him an affectionate letter saying I hoped he was doing well and he wrote back to say that he had learnt some lessons and he was at peace with himself where he was.

“He felt forgiven and understood and had reconciled to all the things that had happened. He was quite rueful.”

O’Brien was the leader of the Catholic Church in Scotland and became a

cardinal in 2003. He publicly opposed homosexuality which he described as “moral degradation”. “I had always been pally with him,” recalled Holloway, “though when he got the red hat I was very disappointed when he came back and denied his own nature by becoming homophobic.”

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Trains ‘no better than model railway’

Nicholas Hellen
Transport Editor

Frustration over train operators’ failure to carry more passengers boiled over this weekend as an independent watchdog warned they were acting as if they were in charge of a “beautiful model railway”.

Anthony Smith, chief executive of Transport Focus, said: “It’s got trains moving around, the signals change, the staff are there, it is lovely and clean – there is just no business.

“What is the point? It is like having an army and you come to the war and you say, ‘We can’t use the army because they might get hurt.’”

Passenger numbers are at only 13% of normal levels, risking blunting the impact of

the £30bn stimulus package announced last week by Rishi Sunak, the chancellor, as people struggle to visit shops and restaurants in town and city centres. Signs and announcements on the rail network still urge passengers to avoid public transport if they can.

Smith said: “The economy is tanking. Part of the key to getting the economy going again, is to get people travelling for work again and in London and the southeast in particular that means having the confidence to use rail travel.”

While social distancing at two metres reduced the capacity of the rail network to 15% of pre-lockdown levels, the switch to one-metre-plus distancing boosts it to between 25% and 50%,

depending on the type of train. It is the apparent failure to seize this opportunity for cautious easing that underlies the frustration.

Smith said some operators had “over-interpreted” government advice, while private bus operators were treating passengers as adults capable of making their own judgments, saying: “Our buses are clean and safe. Come on board.”

Since March, rail operators have benefited from a £3.5bn taxpayer-funded support package, intended to ensure they continue to operate a near-normal service, now at 85% of the usual timetable, without relying on ticket income. It is guaranteed until late September. Smith added: “Eventually you’ve got to offset some of the cost of the

railway because otherwise the Treasury is going to look at this and say, ‘Why are we funding this model railway?’”

One rail operator revealed that a fifth of its passengers are dodging fares, as guards have not been conducting on-board ticket inspections. About 240,000 people work in the railway sector yet on a typical day in July only about 635,000 passenger journeys were made.

The Department for Transport said: “Our priority has always been to ensure the transport network is safe... and our message is under continual review. We have set out guidance for passengers and transport operators and have made face coverings mandatory on public transport.”

@nicholashellen

A BRIGHTER FUTURE IS IN SIGHT, IF WE DO THIS RIGHT.

STICK WITH IT SCOTLAND, FOR YOURSELVES AND EACH OTHER.

All that time spent. All those efforts made. All those tears shed. Let’s not go backwards. The more we stick to the coronavirus guidance now, the sooner we can move forwards, as one, to better days.

#WeAreScotland

CORONAVIRUS
STAY SAFE
PROTECT OTHERS
SAVE LIVES

Healthier Scotland
Scottish Government