

NHS Wales responds to busiest winter on record

Vaughan Gething said:

“These figures confirm we are experiencing the busiest winter on record. Along with record levels of emergency admissions, we’ve seen the highest levels of flu and proportion of elderly patients admitted for many years.

“Despite this pressure the vast majority of patients have received timely, professional care when they need it. I would like to thank NHS Wales, social services and voluntary staff for their outstanding commitment and professionalism in delivering that care during this relentlessly challenging period.

“The pressures we face each winter are a challenge for the whole health and care system to consider and act upon. We provided an additional £10million to Local Health Boards in January in recognition of the exceptional pressure, and a further £10million in February for social care services to support people to stay at home or return to their community more quickly.

“Despite sustained cuts to our funding by the UK Government, our investment in the Welsh NHS has never been higher; with spend per person increasing faster here in 2016-17 than in the rest of the UK. We also invest record levels in the NHS workforce. We recently announced a £100million fund to transform the way health and social services are delivered in Wales to ensure the NHS is fit for the future.”

Mr Gething added:

“Increasing levels of activity have been compounded by the highest GP consultation rate for ‘flu for seven years; exceptionally cold weather conditions causing a spike in respiratory illness; and a 13% increase in the proportion of patients over 75 at Emergency Departments compared to last February.

“In spite of the pressures, 26 week performance improved, the number of people waiting over eight weeks for diagnostics is 31% lower than this time last year and 14 weeks for therapy services is 68% lower than last year, and we expect to see further material improvements up to the end of March.

“I welcome the achievement of the ambulance response time target and the average response time of just 5 minutes and 40 seconds to patients defined as ‘immediately life-threatening’.

“I was pleased to note that the number of people experiencing a delayed transfer of care showed a marked reduction with 51 less delays than those reported in the January period. The total for February is one of the lowest on record. This has been achieved through the resilience planning put in place by health boards and local authorities.

“However, there have been times this winter when patients have been waiting longer than is acceptable. We have been clear with Chief Executives of Health Boards about our expectations around quality of care and performance, and will work with them to evaluate improvements taken this winter.”