

FOR IMMEDIATE RESPONSE
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NHS CONFEDERATION COMMENT ON LABOUR'S HEALTH PLEDGE

The NHS Confederation, whose members include more than 90% of NHS organisations throughout the UK, says that trusts are already tackling the Labour health pledge to reduce maximum waiting times to 18 weeks by 2008.

Dr Gill Morgan, Chief Executive of the NHS Confederation, says: "Our members are already hard at work to ensure that no one will wait longer than 18 weeks from GP referral to hospital treatment, since this target was originally announced by the Department of Health in June 2004.

"There is no doubt that this is a challenging target but NHS trusts have already demonstrated that they are capable of meeting new challenges by massively reducing both the number of patients on waiting lists and the length of time they wait for surgery."

Official waiting list statistics for the NHS in England show that:

Number of patients on waiting lists for hospital treatment

" Reduced from 1,050,000 patients in June 2000 to 958,000 patients in December 2004 and now 843,000 patients in December 2004 (last available statistics).

Number of patients waiting long periods for hospital treatment

" 51,380 patients were waiting more than 12 months in June 2000 but that figure is now just 24 patients - the number of patients waiting more than 9 months had dropped to 34,325 by December 2003 and that figure was reduced to just 86 in December 2004.

Dr Morgan says: "This has been done by delivering more operations as well as by improving administrative systems.

"We have achieved so much by a team effort that includes both frontline clinical staff such as doctors and nurses and non-clinical staff who provide managerial support so that their clinical colleagues are free to concentrate on treating patients."