HSJ

Government's £250m campaign fails to clear waiting list backlog

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The number of patients waiting over 18 weeks for treatment has increased despite the government pouring £250m into the NHS to clear the backlogs of longest waiters over the summer.

The waiting list for planned care has now grown to over 3.2m, the latest official figures reveal.

Fewer patients were admitted in October compared with the same month last year.

They show that 204,390 patients were on waiting lists for more than 18 weeks in October – a steep increase on the same point last year when the number of waiters was 169,907.

The rise is despite the government handing out £250m to clinical commissioning groups to help clear provider backlogs.

Providers had also been given permission to breach waiting time targets in order to focus on treating patients who had waiting the longest.

The breach was initially allowed over the summer months and then later extended into the autumn to ensure that as many long waiting patients as possible were treated.

This “managed breach” period has now finished and providers are expected to meet targets or be fined.

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- Waiting list grows despite £250m government push

The figures show that fewer patients were admitted in October compared with the same month last year, with 330,247 patients admitted for treatment, compared with 336,193 last year.

Waiting times expert Rob Findlay pointed out that admissions per working day in October were the lowest of any October in four years. “Where did the £250m go?” he added.

The growing waiting list also bucks the usual seasonal trend, which sees a fall in the number of patients on waiting lists during the winter months.

In previous years, the length of the waiting list has fallen sharply between August and December.
Last year there was a slight decrease and this year it has grown.

The number of patients waiting over 52 weeks also crept up slightly, with 381 patients waiting.

Seven trusts did not report waiting list figures. These were Barking, Havering and Redbridge University Hospitals Trust, Barts Health Trust, Heart of England Foundation Trust, Royal Berkshire Foundation Trust, Princess Alexandra Hospital Trust, Walsall Healthcare Trust and Tameside Hospital Foundation Trust.