

Busiest January on record for Welsh emergency departments

During a visit to Ysbyty Glan Clwyd emergency department today (Thursday, 21 January), Mr Gething also said he wanted to see an improvement in performance at Emergency Departments, particularly in North Wales, where performance was well below the national average.

He said:

“Last month was the busiest January on record for Emergency Department staff. There was an increase in numbers of seriously ill patients attending, with emergency admissions and attendances at major emergency departments noticeably higher.

“Big spikes in cases of flu and gastroenteritis have contributed to pressure, with more flu cases confirmed in hospitals so far this winter than the same time last year.

“It is testament to our hard-working NHS staff that despite this pressure the number of patients seen and treated within the 4-hour target was the highest for January since 2014.

“Four health boards improved their four-hour performance compared to January last year. While the ambulance target was surpassed for the 41st consecutive month and the average response time for red and amber patients improved compared to the same time last year.

“However, I am disappointed to see an overall drop in emergency departments’ performance indicators, which has been particularly affected by the poor performance at two of the three Emergency Departments in north Wales. I have been clear with the Chief Executive and Chair of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board that I expect to see immediate and continuous improvement following substantial Welsh Government support.

“We are committed to whole system solutions to drive improvement – this is not an Emergency Department issue but one that can be improved by the wider health and social care system.”

The Minister welcomed significant improvements in the longest waiting times for planned care.

He said:

“We are investing record levels in our NHS, including almost £50m this year to tackle some of the longest waiting times. This

investment is paying off as the latest figures show continuing improvement in this area. The number of people waiting over 36 weeks for treatment was 41% lower this December compared to December last year and all health boards are in a better position than they were last year.

“Diagnostic waits over eight weeks were 54% lower in December 2018 than December 2017 and 14 week waits for therapy services show an 83% improvement over the same time period. We expect further improvement in all these areas by the end of March.”

Mr Gething also pointed out that the number of cancer patients seen within the 62 day target improved on December last year and the number of people seen within the target period in 2018 was the highest ever for a calendar year.

“I am pleased to see the number of delayed transfers of care in January decreased by 8% compared to December and by 6% compared to January last year and continues to show a long term downward trend. This is an indication that our commitment to investing in social care is paying off and helping to relieve pressure on the health service.”