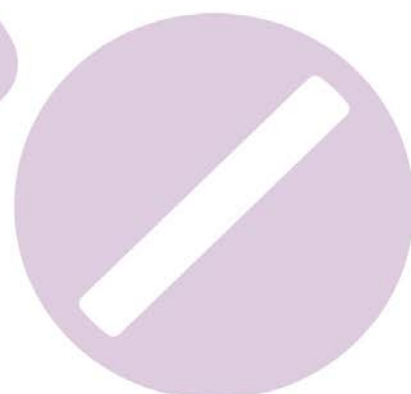
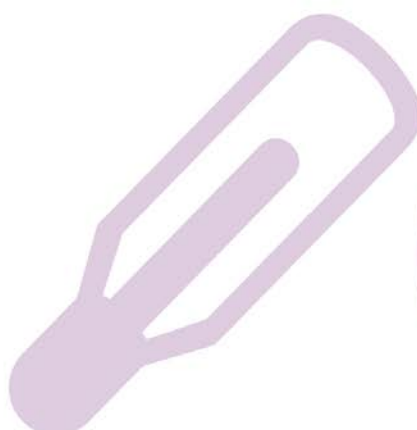


RCEM Winter Flow Project

Analysis of the data so far: 9th March 2018



Introduction

In 2015 we launched the 'Winter Flow Project' in an effort to highlight the difficulties facing an NHS struggling with unprecedented financial difficulties and insufficient resources.

The project looked at patient flow within Emergency Departments over the winter. It was a great success because of the generosity of its contributors, with over 50 NHS Trusts and Health Boards from across the UK submitting data over a six-month period. These data helped to provide a better understanding of system pressures and four-hour standard performance.

The findings enabled RCEM to broaden the debate around emergency medicine beyond the usual narrow focus on the four-hour standard, and meant that providers, commissioners, the national press, and governments in each of the nations of the UK were better informed about the challenges faced by staff working on the NHS frontline.

The project has proven invaluable and is now in its third year. As was the case in previous years, each participating Trust/Board has submitted weekly data on attendances, four-hour standard performance, delayed transfers of care and cancelled elective operations. This data together better reflects pressures, constraints and consequences for system performance. However, in an effort to reflect on-going difficulties in recruiting sufficient numbers of permanent staff, the project this year has also asked participating providers how many locum and agency staff are working in their Emergency Departments.

The data is aggregated to ensure the focus of consideration is the wider health care system rather than the performance of individual Trusts/Boards. Over 50 Trusts/Boards have submitted this data on a weekly basis since the beginning of October.

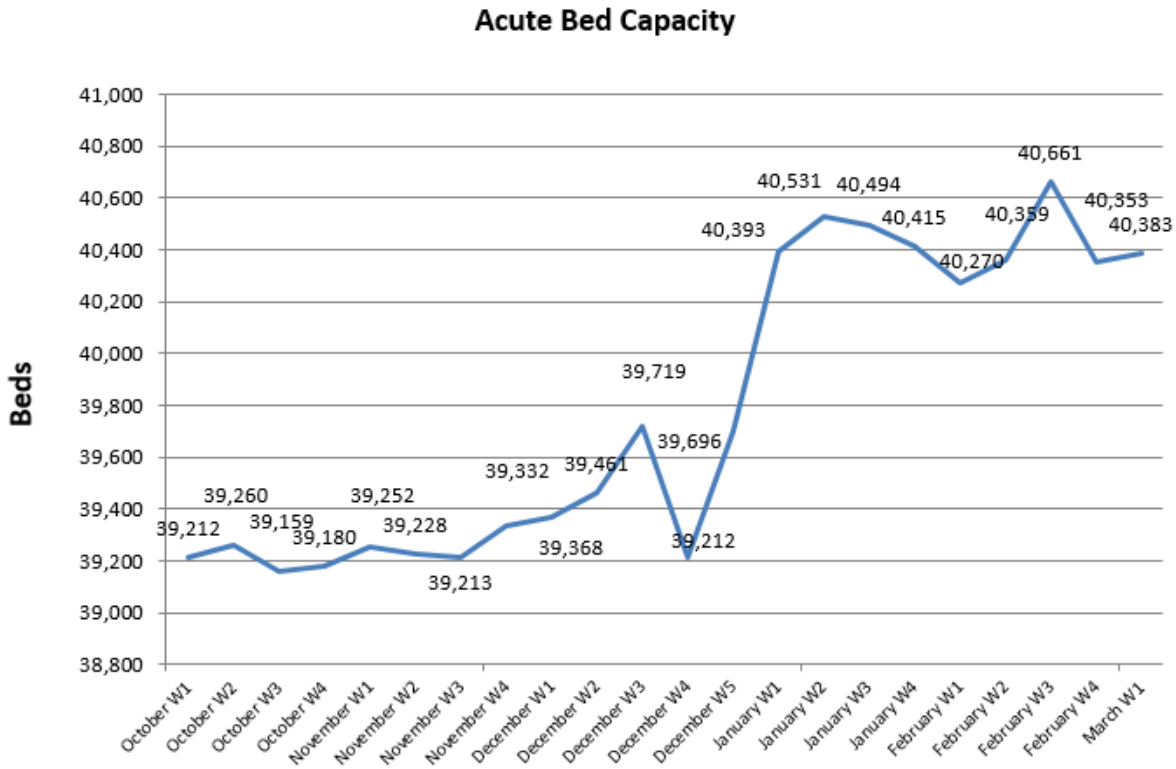
Published on a Friday of the week following data collection, the summary data provide a current overview of 'winter pressures'. The College is grateful to the participants who represent Trusts/Boards of all sizes and geographical locations.

Unlike NHS England datasets there is no suggestion that our project represents a complete or permanent scrutiny of the healthcare system. Our data includes all four countries of the UK though the majority of participating sites lie within England. It is a just sample of Trusts/Boards, albeit a large and representative one.

The data has already been of immense value to the College and allows informed comment and analysis rather than speculation.

The weekly data and trend data are presented in the following tables.

Graph of acute beds in service



Active Bed Management

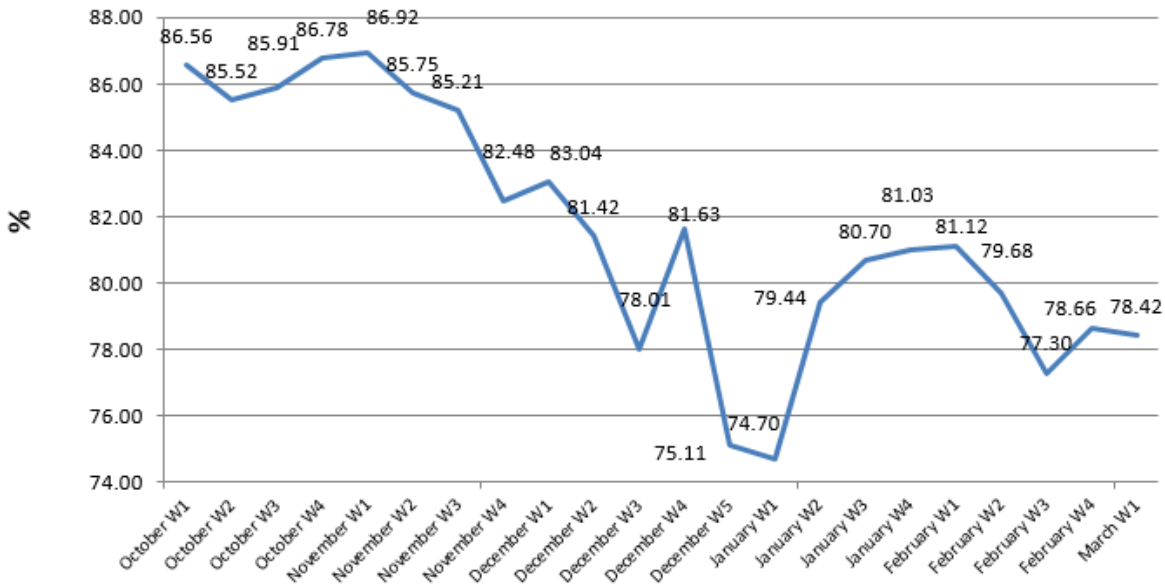
In the first week of March the number of beds within the project group increased to 40,383 up from 40,353 the previous week. In total, there has been a 5.6% increase in the aggregate bed stock from the project starting point.

The extent to which the participating Trusts/Boards are adjusting their bed stock to meet demand is shown in the table below.

	No flexing	0 – 5%	5 – 10%	10 – 15%	15 – 20%
Number of sites	5	12	21	6	12

Graph of four hour performance by week since October

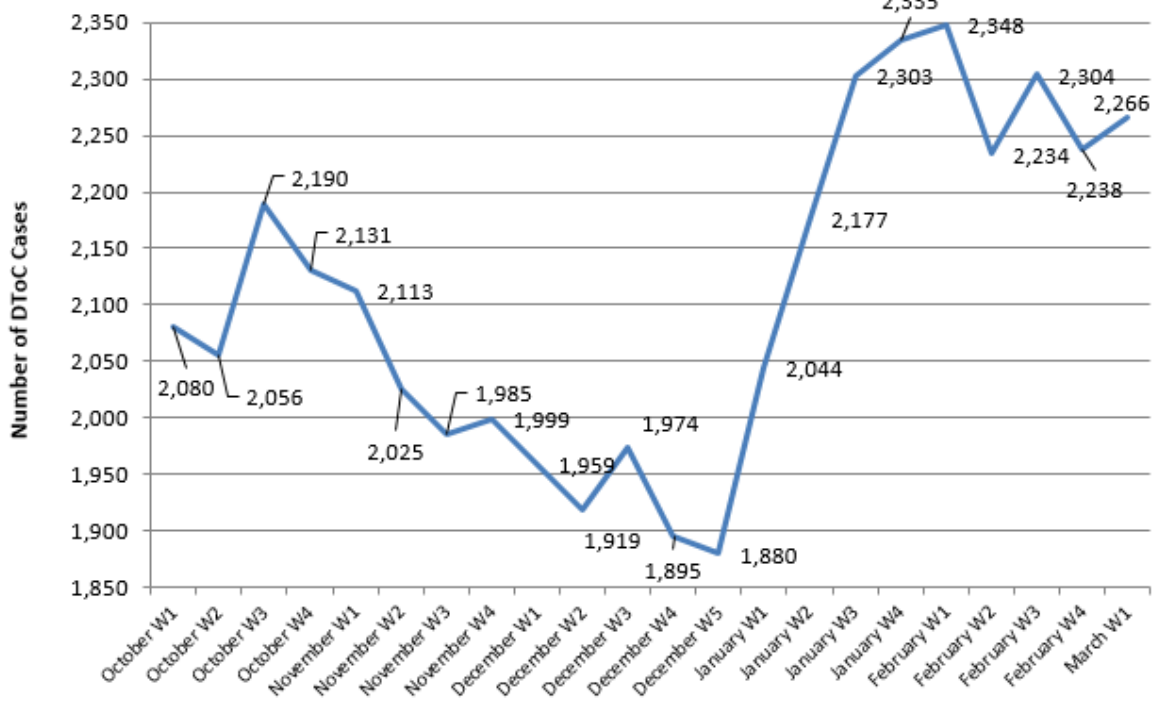
4 Hour Standard Performance - Simple Average Basis



In the first week of March four-hour standard performance stood at 78.42%, down from 78.66% the previous week. The underlying picture shows 27 increases and 26 decreases across the project group.

Graph of Delayed Transfers of Care (DTOCs) by week since October

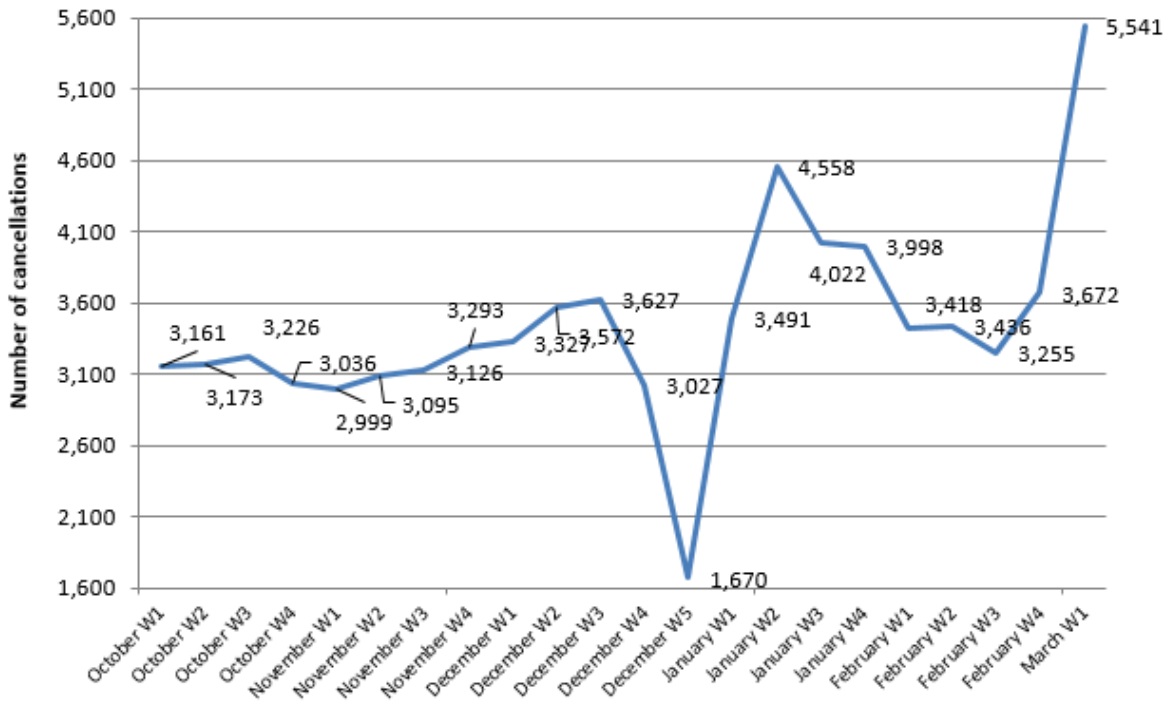
Delayed Transfer of Care Cases



The number of patients subject to DTOC in the first week of March was 2,266, up from 2,238 the previous week. This translates to 5.6% of acute bed stock, unchanged from the previous week. The range across all contributors for this week is a minimum 0.00% - maximum 15.3%.

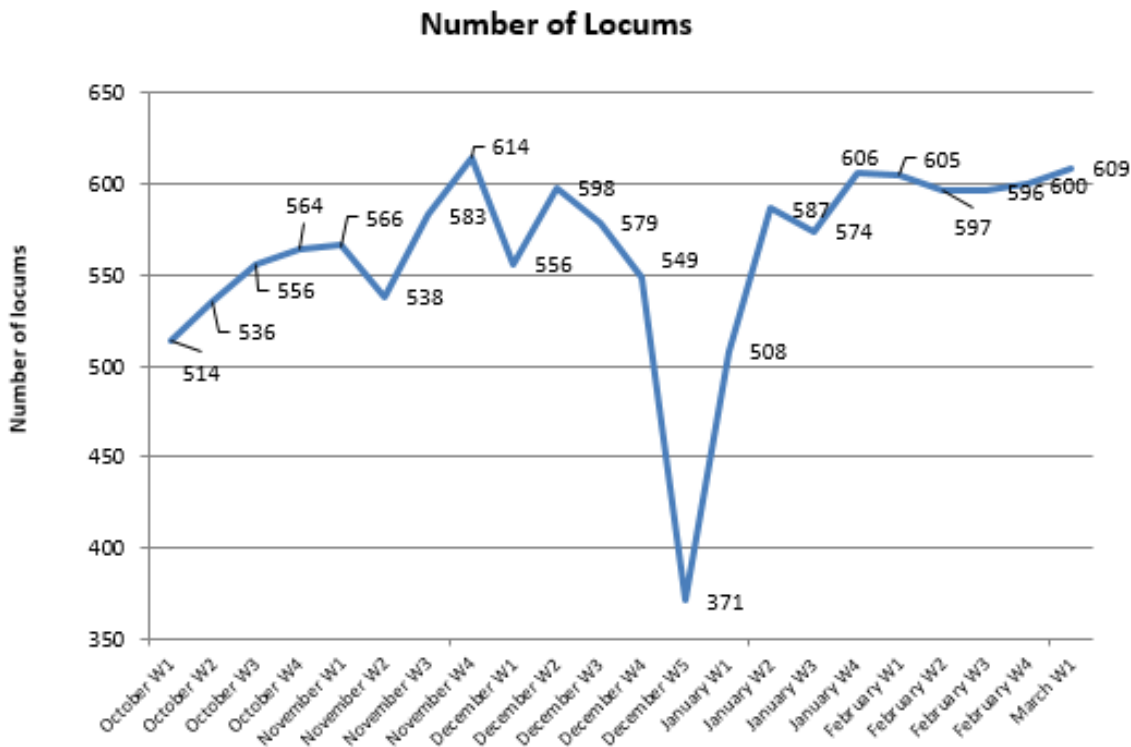
Graph of cancelled elective operations since October

Cancelled Elective Operations



A total of 5,541 elective operations were cancelled this week up from 3,672 the previous week. A total of 75,723 elective operations have been cancelled over the project to date. This represents an overall average of 64 cancelled operations per site per week over the project so far.

Graph of number of locum and agency staff since October



In the first week of March the number of locum and agency doctors and nurses employed within Emergency Departments within the Winter Flow Project group stood at 609 up from 600 the previous week.

Overall

The Winter Flow Project data published this week shows that four-hour standard performance has remain almost static compared with the previous week. At 78.42% this is 0.24 percentage points lower than was the case in the previous week. This is 4.12 percentage points lower than was the case at the same point last year and 4.4 percentage points worse than was the case in 2015-16 (82.82%).

While some dip in performance is to be expected in light of the recent weather conditions effecting much of the UK, there is no getting away from the fact that our Emergency Departments and patients and providers they serve are in crisis. Performance that once would have been regarded as utterly unacceptable has now become normal and things are seemingly only getting worse for patients. While performance issues are more pronounced during the winter, Emergency Departments are now struggling all year round.¹

As one ED consultant put it describing the situation only this week "my department is at break point with zero escalation options left and I think we are about to start losing nursing staff at an accelerated rate. Staff quite rightly are raising patient safety concerns".

¹ RCEM [Royal College of Emergency Medicine urges patients to take action after worst ever 4hr performance figures](#)

This is not an isolated case; such concerns are clearly illustrated by the available evidence. While the Winter Flow data collected over the last three years suggests that bed capacity is likely to have peaked, NHS England Sitrep data for the week ending 4th March shows that acute bed occupancy was at 95.2%.²

In other words, our hospitals are full, and as was pointed out last week, are resorting to extraordinary measures in order to continue caring for their patients. Providers within the Winter Flow group cancelled 5,541 operations this week in an effort to create capacity. This is by some margin the highest figure we have ever recorded and is 3,575 higher than was the case at the same point in 2015-16.

By now the message in these numbers should be loud and clear. If we are to continue to deliver safe and timely care for patients and to achieve the four-hour standard our hospitals are in dire need of the resources necessary to provide the beds and frontline staff required to do so. That is why we are calling on patients to [contact their MP](#) in support of our A&Es and the NHS. The data shows the reality, yet facts are being disregarded and the health sector is not being listened to. We hope that MPs and Ministers will listen to the public who voted for them.

² NHS England [Winter Sitrep Data](#)
Published 09 March 2018