



Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP  
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care  
39 Victoria Street  
London  
SW1H 0EU

Sent by email

2 November 2018

Dear Secretary of State,

Next year marks the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the introduction of the 18-week referral to treatment standard for elective care which has the simple aim of freeing people from pain and discomfort and giving them a sense of security about when they will be treated. The standard was also introduced in recognition of the fact that a lack of timely access to treatment such as hip and knee operations or cataracts can lead to a significant deterioration in a patient's condition, including the development of more severe medical complications which have both health and financial costs.

In recent years however, the health service has not been able to keep up with patient demand and the aim of ensuring 92% of people are treated within 18 weeks of referral has not been met for over two and a half years. With the development of the forthcoming NHS 10-year plan we believe that now is the right time to reconfirm the critical importance of this vital access standard to ensure patients get the care they need at the right time.

Having timely access to care also matters greatly to the wider public. Recent polling conducted by ComRes has found that seven in ten British people believe that meeting the 18-week standard should be a priority if the NHS gets more funding, with the same proportion calling for the target to be met even with the NHS under significant financial pressure. With increased investment in the NHS promised, the Government must be able to demonstrate value for money, and our polling found that over half of British adults said they would be unwilling to pay more tax for the NHS if waiting times for elective treatments were to get longer.

As representatives of medical professionals, health providers and patient groups, we therefore urge you to ensure that additional investment for the NHS is used to cut waiting times for patients, particularly as experience from previous Governments, notably in the early 2000s, has shown that investment in elective care can significantly improve patient's access to treatment.

While this is undoubtedly one of the most challenging periods in the NHS' history, we believe it is vital that the Government commits to retaining patients' rights to access timely care and ensure that the health service does not fall into a mentality that "nothing can be done" to improve waiting times.

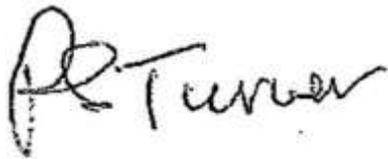
Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Hare". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'D'.

**David Hare, Chief Executive, NHS Partners Network**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Derek Alderson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'D'.

**Professor Derek Alderson, President of Royal College of Surgeons**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phil Turner". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'P'.

**Phil Turner, President of the British Orthopaedic Association**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rachel Power". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'R'.

**Rachel Power, Chief Executive, Patients Association**