20 July 2017

Review of elective waiting lists paves the way for better transparency in Victoria

A review of elective surgery waiting lists and patient records conducted between January and May this year revealed that administrative errors were the cause of over 900 cases across 11 health services where patients were not correctly reported in elective surgery waiting lists.

The review, conducted by PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PwC) on behalf of the new Victorian Agency for Health Information, revealed that the errors were due to use of an old procedure code by 11 health services.

All 11 health services have assessed these cases and, where appropriate, patients have been correctly reassigned to elective surgery waiting lists. The review revealed that the majority of patients who were incorrectly classified were waiting for low urgency plastic and reconstructive surgery, primarily for breast reduction, reconstruction or similar procedures.

All 23 health services reporting elective surgery waiting list data in Victoria, including the 11 health services where errors were found, were reviewed to assess their compliance with the Victorian Elective Surgery Access Policy. The review includes recommendations and clear plans of action for health services to ensure full compliance with the Elective Surgery Access Policy. For Victoria, this will mean greater transparency and confidence that these errors will not happen in future.

As of 31 March 2017 (the completion date for assessment of these cases), 878 people (93%) were clinically assessed, with the remaining patients either unable to be contacted (62 patients) or unable to attend an appointment (8 patients). One person was deceased due to an unrelated cause.

As of 31 March 2017, of the 949 people identified by PwC:

- 34 had received elective surgery at the health service
- 274 were added to waiting lists to receive their surgery, in turn, according to clinical urgency and the length of time they had been waiting
- 633 were removed from waiting lists because they did not have a clear clinical need, declined or no longer required surgery, reported receiving surgery at another health service, could not be contacted or failed to attend the clinic multiple times. One person was deceased due to an unrelated cause.
- 8 were still to be assessed.

Victorian Agency for Health Information CEO Dr Diane Watson said that the review paved the way for improvements among health services and better transparency on waiting lists.

Media enquiries: Contact Richard Adezio - 0422 007 324
“The review clearly revealed areas for improvement in elective surgery waiting list management and the results have been provided to all 23 health services reporting elective surgery waiting list data,” Dr Watson said.

“Today the Victorian Agency for Health Information has made recommendations to all health services and the Department of Health and Human Services to prevent other similar events in the future.

“The patients were in elective surgery waiting list information systems in the health services, but had been assigned to a procedure code for aesthetic (cosmetic) surgeries. The patients who were removed from waiting lists were deemed not to have a clinical need for surgery.

“A further recommendation of the report will see the Victorian Agency for Health Information undertake future audits to ensure ongoing compliance with the relevant policies, and a more transparent system,” Dr Watson said.

The report is available for download from the Victorian Agency for Health Information website (www.vahi.vic.gov.au).

**About the review**

The review was commissioned by the new Victorian Agency for Health Information, after the Department of Health and Human Services became aware in December 2016 of over 900 patients who had not been placed on the publicly reported elective surgery waiting list due to an administrative error.

**About the Victorian Agency for Health Information**

The Victorian Agency for Health Information (the Agency) was formally established as an Administrative Office of the Victorian Government on 1 July 2017. The Agency will analyse and share information across our system to ensure everyone has an accurate picture of the performance of health services across Victoria. The agency’s responsibilities will flow across measurement of patient care and outcomes for three key purposes: public reporting, oversight and clinical improvement.

**About Dr Diane Watson**

The Agency is led by Dr Diane Watson. Dr Watson was the inaugural Chief Executive Officer of the National Health Performance Authority and also the inaugural Chief Executive Officer of the NSW Bureau of Health Information.

Media enquiries: Contact Richard Adezio - 0422 007 324