

Question to the 14 May 2025 Board meeting

How have Audiology service wait times become so bad? The current expected wait time, shown on the department's website, for a hearing test is 18 months to 2 years. The expected wait between that test and the hearing aid being fitted is a further 6 months.

NHS figures show that the national median wait time for a hearing test is 4.3 weeks. Last month's figures show that nationally 28,000 people were waiting above 13 weeks. The Trust has 6,000. i.e. Approximately 20%. Or it must be one of the worst five trusts in the country.

This is with a set of metrics that stop at 13 weeks. It wouldn't be unreasonable to guess that the trust has a much higher proportion of the above 56 weeks numbers.

The trust shows the "Risk of Regulatory non-compliance within Audiology Service" has a score of 20, which seems to indicate a serious problem, but I haven't seen anything in the videos of the board meetings to show how this situation occurred or any solution.

It is interesting that the Trust's figures are often "excluding audiology". I appreciate that the trust has many pressing demands, but it is either assuming responsibility for the audiology service in this area or not.

Regards

CP

Response from Chief Nurse

Following on from a national review of audiology services, ENHT was asked to pause paediatric audiology by NHSE, however we were not allowed to suspend our waiting list due to waits remaining longer elsewhere. At this time the department went through significant change and some specialist technical staff left our Trust. We commissioned independent reviews of our service to ensure transparency and effectiveness of clinical pathways, by GSTT.

We have had in place governance oversight for audiology from our ICB, and the regional Chief Scientist, as well as the national audiology team, who have continued to review our progress on all aspects of the clinical service.

ENHT has requested mutual aid from across the region, with only a small number of children able to be seen in other centres. We have also used an independent provider to support seeing some of the children on the waiting list.

The waiting list data is accurate on the question being asked. Without mutual aid or stopping the waiting list, currently we have a two year waiting list to be seen, we constantly screen for high risk or vulnerable children to ensure that they are identified and seen as early as possible.

For the past twelve months as a Trust, we have successfully recruited high calibre audiologists, in paediatrics and also our Head of Department. We have now opened all of our paediatric pathways; we have evidenced based clinical pathways in place for patients. We have made a significant investment in equipment and the environment, with more planned at The Hertford County Hospital site. All of our adult audiology pathways are open with the exception of Vestibular and Tinnitus. Audiology is on our risk register and the risk is regularly reviewed. The QSC committee is due to have a full update on Audiology services.