
Director General for Regulation

Richard Kingston
(by email)

27 September 2017

Dear Mr Kingston

Thank you very much for your email of 27 September, pointing out the misleading statement about cancer waiting times made by the Scottish Government in their news briefing "Improving cancer diagnosis and treatment". We agree with the analysis in your email (Annex 1) that the news briefing should have been clear that the average 6 day wait applies only *once a decision to treat has been made*.

We brought this matter to the attention of Scottish Government officials involved when we noticed it this morning and they said it was as a result of quality assuring the news briefing rather than a problem with the original statistics release. They acted quickly to update the news briefing by early afternoon, to accurately reflect the statistics and to inform media outlets about the update.

It is important for the maintenance of public trust in statistics that government statements referring to official statistics should accurately reflect the underlying statistics and we are asking officials to review their quality assurance processes.

I am copying Roger Halliday, Chief Statistician at the Scottish Government.

Yours sincerely



Ed Humpherson

Director General for Regulation

Annex 1

Dear Mr Humpherson

1. In the official government news release yesterday (26 September 2017) the cabinet secretary for health and sport, Shona Robison, states:

"The average wait for cancer treatment is 6 days currently. However, some waits are too long and the new delivery group will report back to me in early 2018 with recommendations to enhance cancer diagnosis and treatment going forward."

<https://news.gov.scot/news/improving-cancer-diagnosis-and-treatment>

2. In the ISD figures published yesterday, the median wait for cancer treatment from urgent referral is 41 days, some 7 times longer than the CS stated.

<https://www.isdscotland.org/Health-Topics/Waiting-Times/Publications/2017-09-26/2017-09-26-CWT-Report.pdf>

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"During the period April to June 2017, the median wait between the date of receipt of referral and the first cancer treatment was 41 days;"

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"During the period April to June 2017, the median wait between the date of decision to treat and the first cancer treatment was 6 days;"

3. Ms Robison has clearly misrepresented and misused official statistics in her government news release.

The 6 day figure represents only the latter period from the "decision to treat and the first cancer treatment", thus 6 days is NOT "the average wait for cancer treatment"

I would be grateful for your consideration of this matter.

Kind regards

Richard Kingston