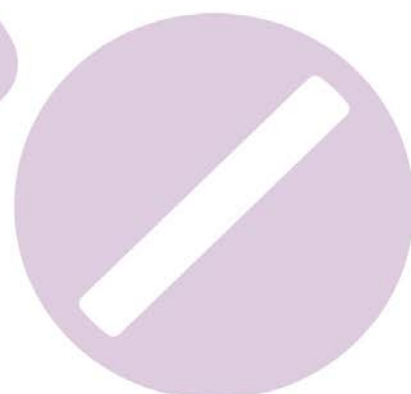
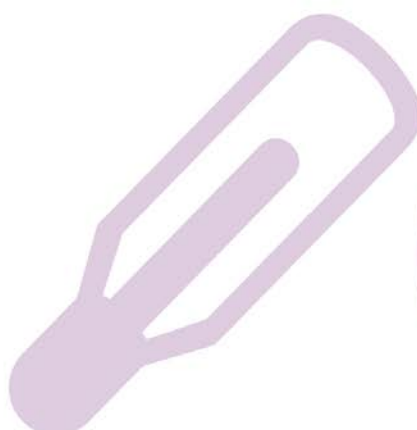


RCEM Winter Flow Project

Analysis of the data so far: 21st December 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 four countries 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 fourth year. In our view, the project has also been instrumental in making the case for additional resources for the health sector; which is now reflected in the new settlement for the NHS which has recently been announced by the Government.

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. In an effort to reflect on-going staff shortages we have also asked participating providers to tell us how many locum and agency staff are working in their Emergency Departments. This staffing measure is now in its second year. These data points together better reflect pressures, constraints and consequences for system performance.

The data are 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 these data on a weekly basis since the beginning of October.

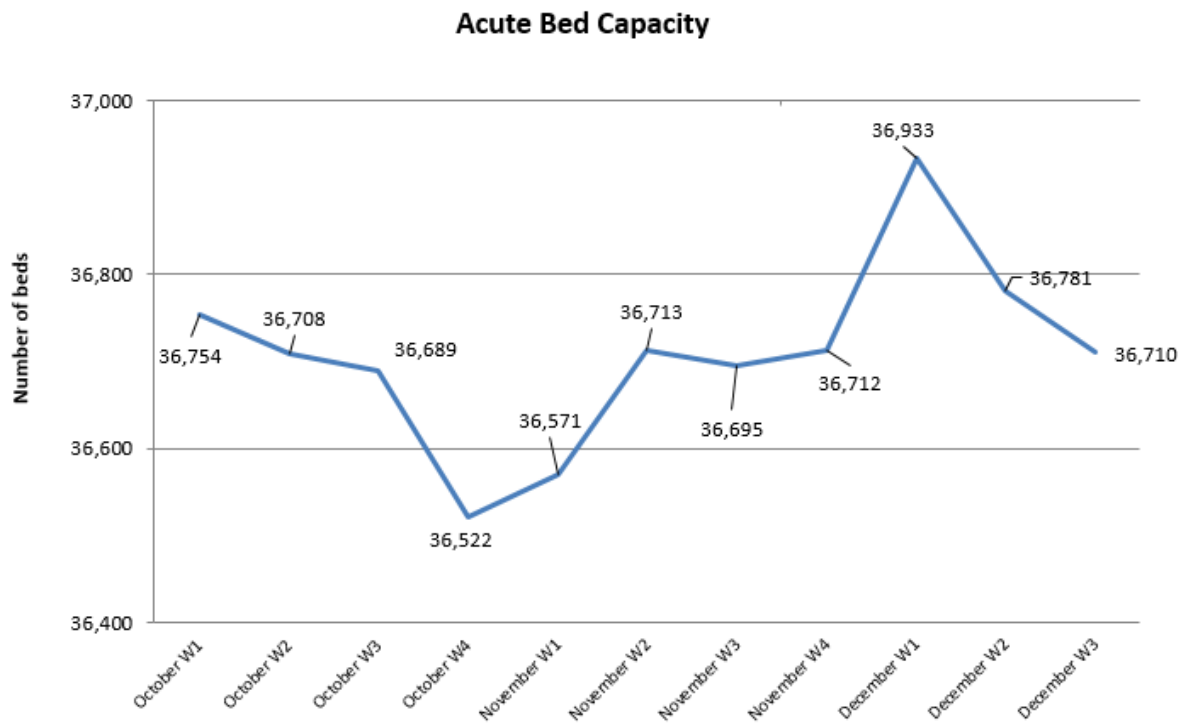
Published on a Friday of the week following data collection, the summary data provide a current overview of 'winter pressures'. The College is grateful to the participants who represent Trusts/Boards of all sizes and geographical locations.

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

The data have already been of immense value to the College and allow 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

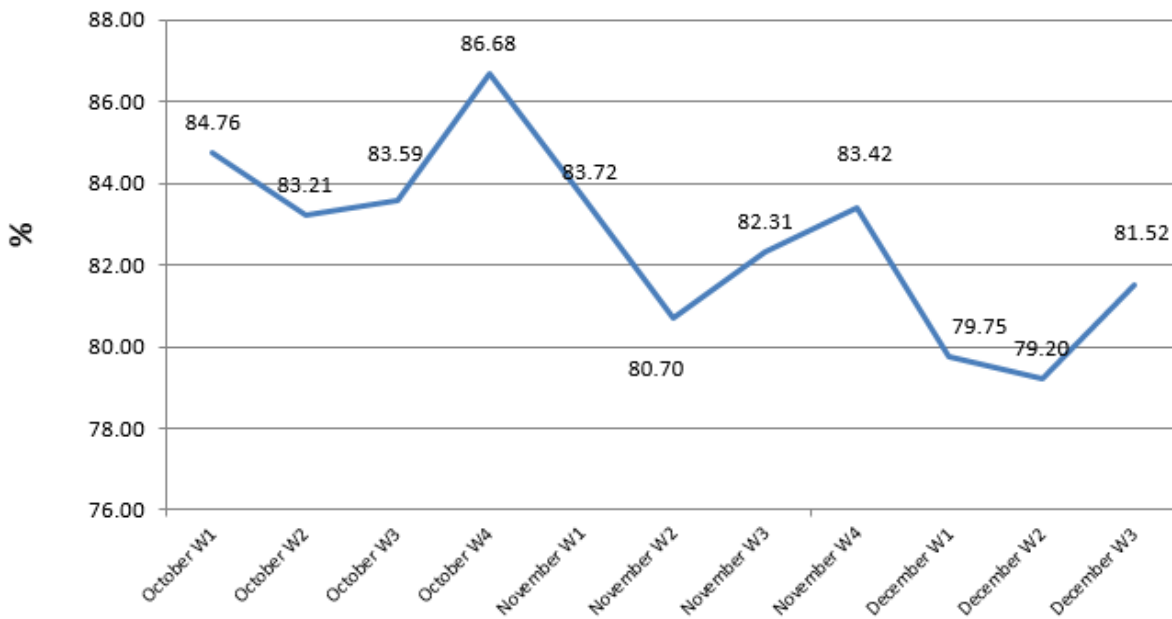
In the third week of December, the number of beds within the project group decreased to 36,710 – down from 36,781 the previous week. In total, there has been a 1.7% increase in the aggregate bed stock from the project starting point.

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	11	29	9	5	0

Graph of four-hour performance by week since October

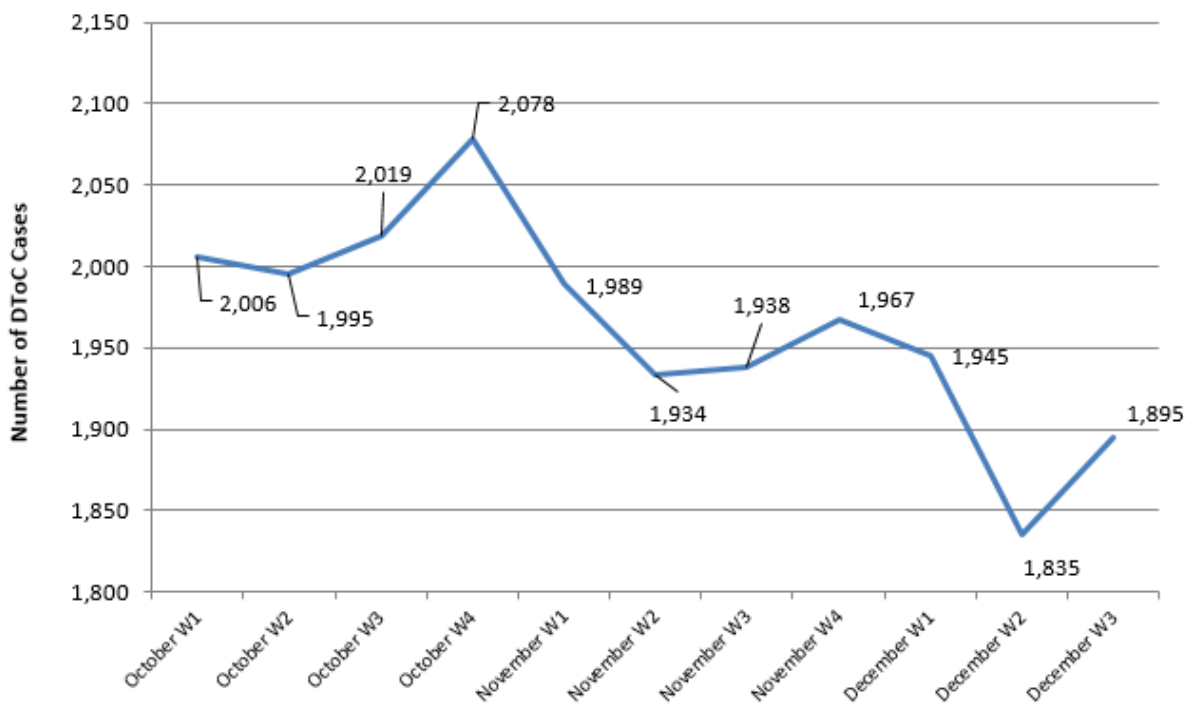
4 Hour Standard Performance - Simple Average Basis



In the third week of December, four-hour standard performance stood at 81.52% - up from 79.20% the previous week. The underlying picture shows 23 increases and 21 decreases across the project group.

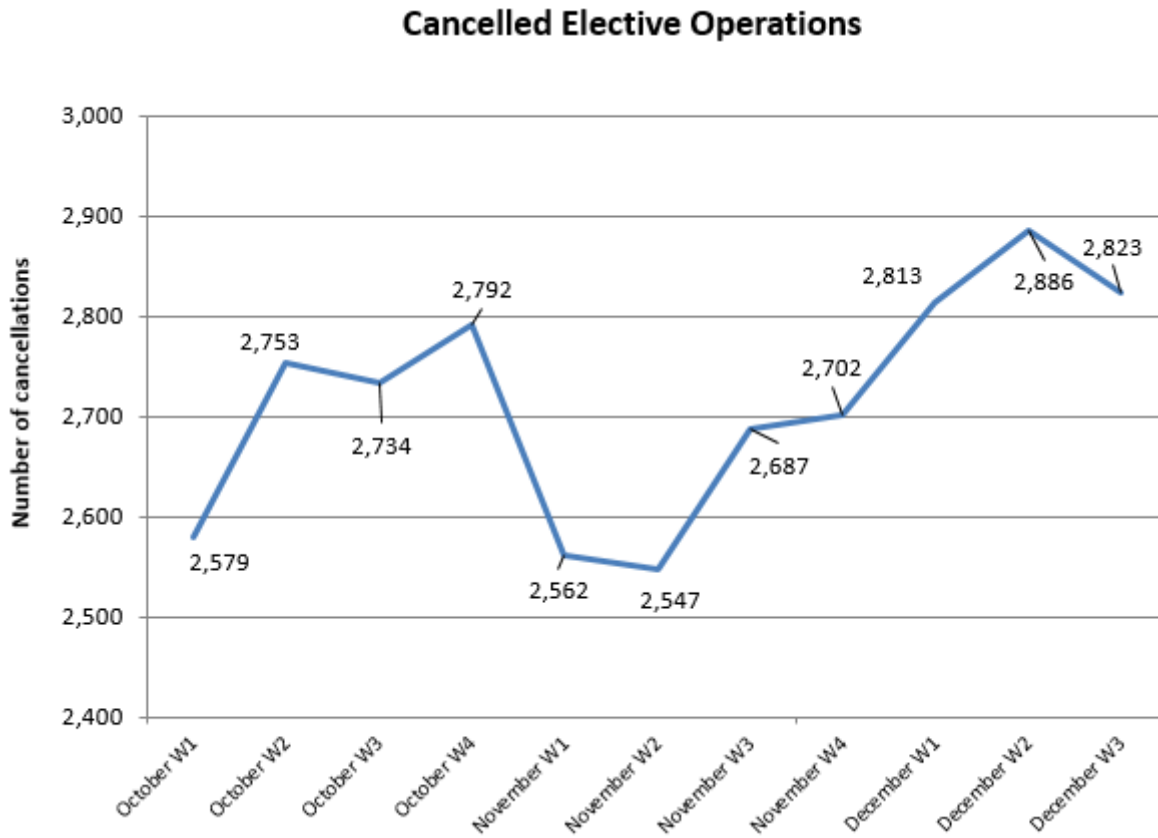
Graph of Delayed Transfers of Care (DTOCs) by week since October

Delayed Transfer of Care Cases



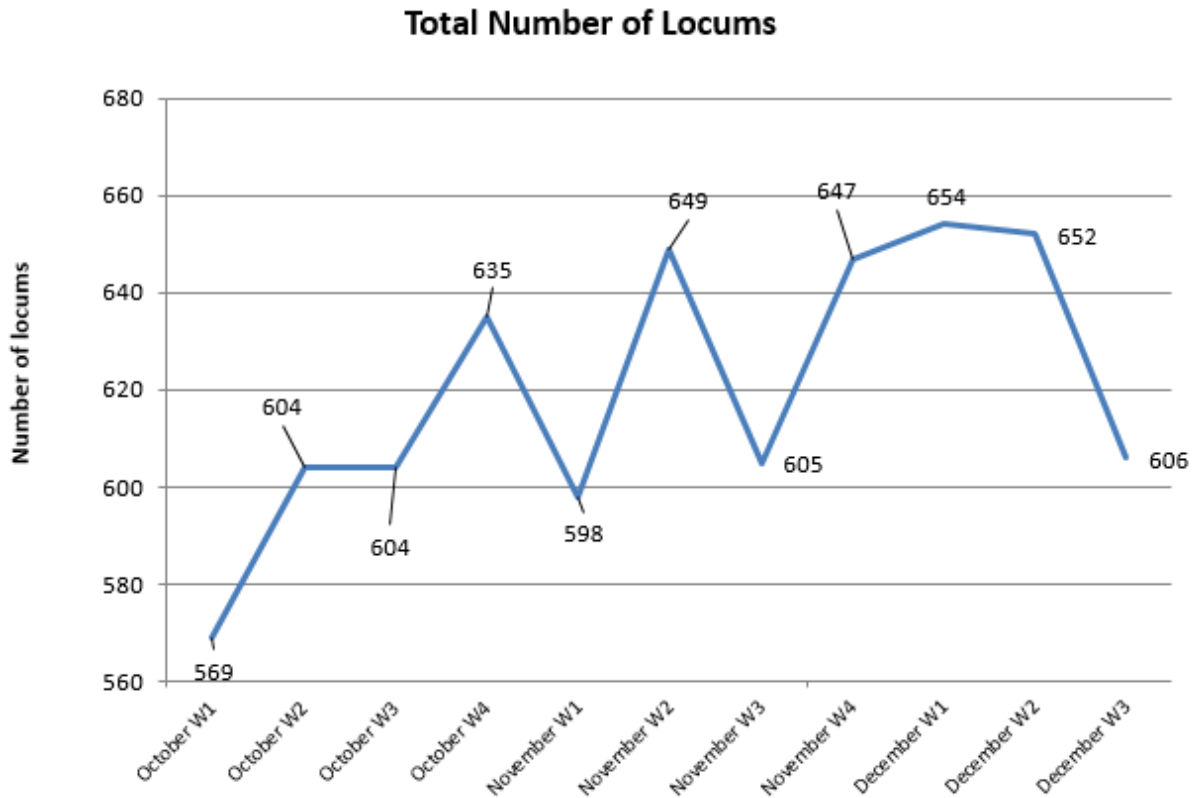
The number of patients subject to DTOC in the third week of December was 1,895 - up from 1,835 the previous week. This translates to 5.16% of acute bed stock - up from 4.99% the previous week. The range across all contributors for this week is a minimum 0.00% to a maximum 26.7%.

Graph of cancelled elective operations since October



A total of 2,823 elective operations were recorded as cancelled this week - up from 2,886 the previous week. A total of 29,878 elective operations have been cancelled over the project to date. This represents an overall average of 51 cancelled operations per site per week over the project as a whole.

Graph of number of locum and agency staff since October



In the third week of December, the number of locum and agency doctors and nurses employed within Emergency Departments within the Winter Flow Project group stood at 606 down from 652 the previous week.

Overall

The Winter Flow data published this week shows a welcome improvement in four-hour standard performance. At 81.52%, while we are still nearly 14 percentage points away from 95% compliance with the four-hour standard¹, it is only fair to point out that this week's performance is 3.51 percentage points higher than was the case at the same point in 2017 (78.01%) and 2.32 percentage points higher than was the case the previous week.

This is positive news but considered as a whole this data still clearly illustrates the general decline in performance that has taken place since the Winter Flow Project started in 2015-16. In the third week of December 2015 performance stood at 86.26%.

Other aspects of this week's data are less welcome. The number of elective operations remains close to the peak figure so far reached this year (2,886). Although there is some evidence that this has improved patient flow, choosing not to treat one group of patients in order to improve the treatment of another group of patients has baleful consequences for providers' finances and runs the risk that additional patients will arrive in Emergency Departments, having otherwise been denied treatment.

¹ [The Handbook to the NHS Constitution](#)
Published 21 December 2018

Similarly, the data collected by Winter Flow suggests that much of the earlier positive progress around Delayed Transfers of Care has stalled. At 1,895, the number of patients recorded as subject to DTOC in the third week of December represents a 3.26% increase on the previous week.

What this shows is that everybody working in our Emergency Departments – and the hospitals they form part of – is working very hard to maintain performance and standards of patient care. Given that bed occupancy remains well above 90%² and this all too often means treating patients in corridors, the improvement evident this week is a credit to the dedication of NHS staff as we head into the festive season.

² [Winter Daily SitRep 2017-18 Data](#)
Published 21 December 2018