

Trusts miss hygiene goals

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Trusts have failed to hit targets for reducing MRSA and many are not meeting basic standards for hygiene and cleanliness.

The Healthcare Commission's annual health check found overall performance on hygiene standards had slipped. Dozens of trusts are failing to live up to the hygiene code for cutting hospital infections.

Progress on cutting MRSA levels has been slow and overall performance against the target to reduce the infection is worse than last year.

The findings will ramp up pressure on health service managers struggling to eliminate infections such as MRSA and *Clostridium difficile* from hospital wards.

However, Healthcare Commission chief executive Anna Walker told *HSJ* the slip in performance was partly due to the fact that standards on hygiene were much tougher.

The commission looked at trusts' performance against a raft of core standards.

Of the five standards where national performance was worst, two were linked to hygiene.

A total of 111 trusts failed on one or more standards linked to the tougher hygiene code introduced in October last year.

The commission found 41 trusts



Battle against infection: a medic uses antiseptic spray to clean her hands.

failed to comply with a standard that requires them to limit the risk of infection through basic hygiene precautions and cleanliness. A further 14 trusts could not show they met the standard. Last year nearly 93 per cent met the standard, compared with 84 per cent this year.

The number of trusts meeting standards on decontaminating medical devices between patients

and providing clean environments has also fallen.

Many trusts are also failing to hit national targets on MRSA, which require a year-on-year improvement. Nine trusts had failed to hit their MRSA targets for two years running.

The findings will boost fears the government will not meet its target of halving MRSA rates by March

2008. In 2006-07, 76 out of 172 acute and specialist trusts met targets on cutting MRSA compared with just over half the year before.

The commission said targets for 2006-07 had been more demanding, yet 59 trusts had managed to keep on track for two years while 25 trusts had improved their performance this year.

'Infections are being reduced, but progress so far has been slower than planned and this has led to a worsening of trust scores overall,' the commission's report said.

The commission is going into 120 trusts this year as part of efforts to boost hygiene.

'What we are seeing is that where trusts take infection control seriously you can see dramatic reduction in infection,' Ms Walker said.

'What has emerged from all the visits we're doing at the moment is a similar story to Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells [where *C difficile* killed at least 90 people] - not in terms of the level of failure but in terms of what it is that needs to be put right.'

She said trust boards must make infection control a priority from the board to the ward.

Other priorities were staff training and ensuring that isolation facilities were in place.

See news, page 15.

COMPETITION

IT problems limit choice

The government's patient choice target is proving too tough for many trusts, the health check reveals.

The Department of Health set a target that, from December 2005, all patients would be able to choose from at least four healthcare providers for planned hospital care, paid for by the NHS. A key part of this is the choose and book programme, which gives patients a choice of out-patient services.

But only 11 per cent of primary care trusts achieved the target of 90 per cent choose and book utilisation by March 2007. Patients in just 9 per cent of trusts said they had been offered a choice of hospital and a choice booklet.

Commission chief executive Anna Walker said reasons for poor performance included IT problems and the fact that GPs were not contracted to provide choose and book.

The best and worst

'Double excellent' trusts

- Basingstoke and North Hampshire foundation trust
- Birmingham Children's Hospital foundation trust
- Calderdale and Huddersfield foundation trust
- Cambridge University Hospitals foundation trust
- Chelsea and Westminster Hospital foundation trust
- Chesterfield Royal Hospital foundation trust
- Frimley Park Hospital foundation trust
- Guy's and St Thomas' foundation trust
- Heart of England foundation trust
- Liverpool Women's Hospital foundation trust
- Papworth Hospital foundation trust
- Queen Victoria Hospital foundation trust
- Royal Marsden foundation trust
- Salford Royal foundation trust
- Sheffield Children's foundation trust
- Sheffield Teaching Hospitals foundation trust
- South Essex Partnership foundation trust
- South Staffordshire Healthcare foundation trust
- Yeovil District Hospital foundation trust

'Double weak' trusts

- Cumbria primary care trust
- Devon primary care trust
- East and North Hertfordshire primary care trust
- Great Western Ambulance Service trust
- Leicestershire County and Rutland primary care trust
- Luton Teaching primary care trust
- Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells trust
- Mid Essex primary care trust
- **Northern Devon Healthcare trust**
- **Royal Cornwall Hospitals trust**
- Royal United Hospital Bath trust
- Scarborough and North East Yorkshire Healthcare trust
- Sheffield primary care trust
- **Surrey and Sussex Healthcare trust**
- Surrey primary care trust
- West Hertfordshire Hospitals trust
- **West Hertfordshire primary care trust**
- Wiltshire primary care trust
- Worcestershire Acute Hospitals trust
- Yorkshire Ambulance Service trust

Trusts in bold scored 'double weak' for second consecutive year

SERVICE IMPROVEMENT

Twin woes for Cornwall chief

Royal Cornwall Hospitals trust was one of four trusts to score weak on both quality of services and use of resources for the second year running (see table).

In its own assessment of progress the trust board told the Healthcare Commission that it would not meet 31 out of 44 of its targets.

Chief executive John Watkinson, who joined the trust in January, said one of his priorities had been to build a stronger management team.

'We are an organisation in change and we have to focus on building competency and capacity,' he said.

'Another priority has been making sure we are absolutely honest and robust about where we are.'

He said the trust was making progress and had already achieved 21 of the standards. He was confident the trust would be 'fully compliant' by spring 2008.