



Agenda Item: 7

Waiting Times Frame Work

Purpose

This agenda item has been requested to be tabled by a number of Action Teams, key issues that have been raised include; Administrative Burden, Validation, Compliance and overall use of the information collected.

Members are asked to consider the issues outlined below:

- To what extent the early collection problems are initial teething problems that will be overcome as the system 'beds in'
- Is it considered that there will be an ongoing administrative burden to local Action Teams that will require extra resources
- Are there particular areas identified for improvement within the system that require dialogue with either the Scottish Executive or ISD on a collective Action Team basis
- Is there sufficient clarity concerning when and where the data will be published

Background – Summary of Key Issues Raised

The information presented in this paper has been incorporated from a recent presentation by, Mark Connelly to the Action Team support officers meeting held in August 2004.

Administrative Burden

The implementation of the national information framework has resulted in an increased administrative burden on both agency and ADAT support staff (in some cases this has been estimated to equivalent to more than one full-time member of staff) with no input of additional resources.

This administrative burden has been exacerbated by problems with both the Excel spreadsheet template provided by ISD for services, and the Access

database provided for the ADAT support staff. ISD have been addressing these initial I.T. problems on a local Action Team basis and are of the view that the all outstanding I.T. problems will be resolved over the coming few months.

Validation

Since the implementation of the framework in April 2004, the main source of administrative burden has been the fact that the Microsoft Excel template provided by ISD contains no means of validation. This has led to an excessive amount of correspondence back and forth between ADAT support officers and agency administrators regarding errors on the spreadsheet.

Essentially, while the ADAT Microsoft Access database has standard inbuilt validation criteria as to the format of the data it will accept, the spreadsheet will accept an endless amount of "dirty data" and errors will not be flagged until an attempt has been made to upload to the database. This results in the automatic generation of an "error log" which is then returned to the service in order that they can correct the errors at their end and re-send the spreadsheet. In discussions with ISD on these problems they indicate that there will shortly be a second release of the template in order to overcome these error problems. This new system will include built in validation mechanisms.

Besides these problems with the XL spreadsheets used by the agencies collecting the data, there are also difficulties with the Access database provided to ADATs for collation and reporting purposes. Further reported problems with the database are that it does not lend itself to networking which would allow multiple users to operate it (such a development would require extensive agreement on security and confidentiality issues). An additional concern raised is that the data cannot be manipulated to perform any functions other than the limited number of predetermined reports that are built-in.

Compliance

At the level of individual services, it is likely that the perception of an unnecessary burden in relation to the national information framework would affect the level of compliance - there is no obvious means of ensuring or checking that individuals who should be recording data on new clients are doing so consistently. Indeed, local experience suggests that this is the case.

Compliance issues also exist at ADAT-level. According to (HDL (2003) 27): "It will, however, be for DAATs to ensure that local agencies are collecting and returning waiting times data in accordance with the agreed arrangements". However, due to potential inconsistency between ADAT areas it is unclear whether local ADATs have the accountability structure to achieve this. It is therefore possible that some agencies will be unable or will refuse to provide the information. This has already been the experience in some Action Team Areas.

Longer Term Considerations

Even once initial software problems are overcome, some Action Teams are still raising doubts regarding the value of the waiting times information provided. Key concerns seem to relate to:

- The framework seems most useful at an individual service level rather than a higher strategic level
- The extent to which the current system can measure waiting times between local services seems to be unclear. (Whilst there is an ability for a degree of local measurement to take place between services the aggregate data that goes to the Scottish Executive on a quarterly basis does not measure waiting times per se)
- Diversity in working practices (and therefore how the data is recorded) mean that comparison or aggregation of waiting times of multiple services may result in meaningless data
- Other potentially important steps of the client journey, such as the pre-referral stage for a client trying to get a GP, are not included (this aspect would require a unique identifier and was not built into the original specification).