

Fracture Liaison Service (FLS) provision Freedom of Information (FOI) request.

Summary of responses

On the 18th May 2021 we sent Freedom of Information (FOI) requests to the 123 NHS Trusts across England to assess levels of provision of Fracture Liaison Services (FLS) and to determine the quality of the FLS provision benchmarked against national standards. To date we have received a 90% response rate, with 111 NHS Trust replying to the request (one not providing any information), with 12 NHS Trust still outstanding. All 12 of the non-responders acknowledged receipt of the request. Reminders were sent to all non-responders and then followed up further with letters to the Chief Executive of each outstanding NHS Trust.

Access and coverage

Only **63/123 (51%) NHS Trusts** were able to confirm they had a FLS, with 79% of the FLS provided offered in secondary care. 48/123 NHS Trusts confirmed they do not have a FLS, with 20 confirming they instead have some other form of pathway for bone health management of fracture patients. A further 12/123 were unable to confirm either way.

We are concerned that 49% (60/123) of NHS trusts do not have a Fracture Liaison Service, underlining the postcode lottery for access to an FLS, which leads to severe health inequalities for fragility fracture patients.

Quality and reach

Even where an FLS is in place, compliance with national quality standards is extremely variable. We acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on NHS services and FLS provision throughout 2020. Therefore, we asked the following quality-related questions for 2019 and 2020 to compare results pre-pandemic and to off-set for recent disruption.

Worryingly, the findings show widespread under-performance on quality, with most Trusts falling consistently short of the national standards, which involve identifying and seeing at least 80% of patients in a timely way, and then following up at agreed intervals to ensure, amongst other things, that patients stick to their medication regime

What we asked: What percentage of people over 50 with a fracture were offered access to a FLS?

For 2019, only **19/123 (15.4%) of NHS Trusts** confirmed they were able to identify 80%+ of their patients aged 50 years and over with a recent diagnosed fragility fracture and in 2020 performance declined further to just 14/123 (11.3%) NHS Trusts.

We're concerned that the vast majority of FLSs (84.6% in 2019 – 89.4% 2020) are not identifying sufficient patient numbers over 50 who experience a fragility fracture, resulting in missed opportunities to prevent further fractures and to diagnose and treat osteoporosis

What we asked: What percentage of people referred to FLS received an assessment within 12 weeks of fracture diagnosis?

For both 2019 and 2020 only **30/123 (24.4%) NHS Trusts** confirmed that they saw 80%+ of the patients referred to their FLS within 12 weeks of fracture diagnosis.

We are concerned that all patients referred to a FLS should be seen with 12 weeks of fracture diagnosis and that only 24.4% of NHS Trusts can confirm they see patients promptly.

What we asked: For those patients receiving osteoporosis drug treatment, what percentage were reviewed for follow up 16 weeks from fracture?

Follow up was also found to be poor, with only **8/123 (6.5%) NHS Trusts** confirming that they review 80%+ of patients on osteoporosis treatment 16 weeks from fracture.

We're concerned that 93.5% of NHS Trusts are not following up 80%+ of patients receiving osteoporosis treatment. Patients receiving osteoporosis treatment should be followed up 16 weeks from fracture to ensure that any recommended treatment has commenced and is being taken as prescribed, reducing the risk of further fragility fractures.

What we asked: For those patients receiving osteoporosis drug treatment what percentage were reviewed for follow up 52 weeks from fracture?

For 2019 only **10/123 (8%) NHS Trusts** confirmed they followed up 80%+ of patients on drug treatment 52 weeks on from fracture, with only a slight improvement for 2020 to 13/123 (10.5%).

We're concerned to see that the vast majority of FLSs (89.5%) are not following up sufficient numbers of patients placed on osteoporosis treatment, and that a large proportion of FLSs either do not follow up patients or cannot provide any information on follow up.

Sustainable funding

What we asked: Is your FLS a permanent service funded by a sustainable source? (e.g. commissioning, health board/trust funded)

50/123 (40.6%) NHS Trusts confirmed they have permanent, sustainable funding in place for an FLS, with a further 6/123 (5%) NHS Trusts confirming they only have partial funding in place.

We're concerned that 54.4% of NHS Trusts have been unable to confirm permanent funding or have no funding in place to deliver a FLS.

Of the 48/111 NHS Trusts that stated they do not have a FLS, **33/48 (68.7%)** said they had tried (21/48) or are trying (13/48) to secure funding to deliver a FLS.