

Epidural Delays in Obstetrics at Nottingham University Hospitals

Dr Sharon Chan (Clinical Fellow), Dr Arani Pillai (Consultant Anaesthetist)

Background

The GPAS guidelines for obstetrics 2023 ⁽¹⁾ has shortened the target timescale between informing the anaesthetist of an epidural request and the attendance of the anaesthetist:

- **Delay of >30min should be exceptional.**
- Anaesthetist should **always attend within 1 hour.**
- Previously, delays >1 hour were allowed in exceptional circumstances.

The Trust has 8000 births per year spread similarly across 2 tertiary obstetric units. A minimum of 2 competent obstetric anaesthetists are resident during working hours, and 1 out of hours. There are also independent morning elective lists at both sites on Mondays-Fridays.

Aim

An audit of time delays in anaesthetic attendance after labour epidural requests.

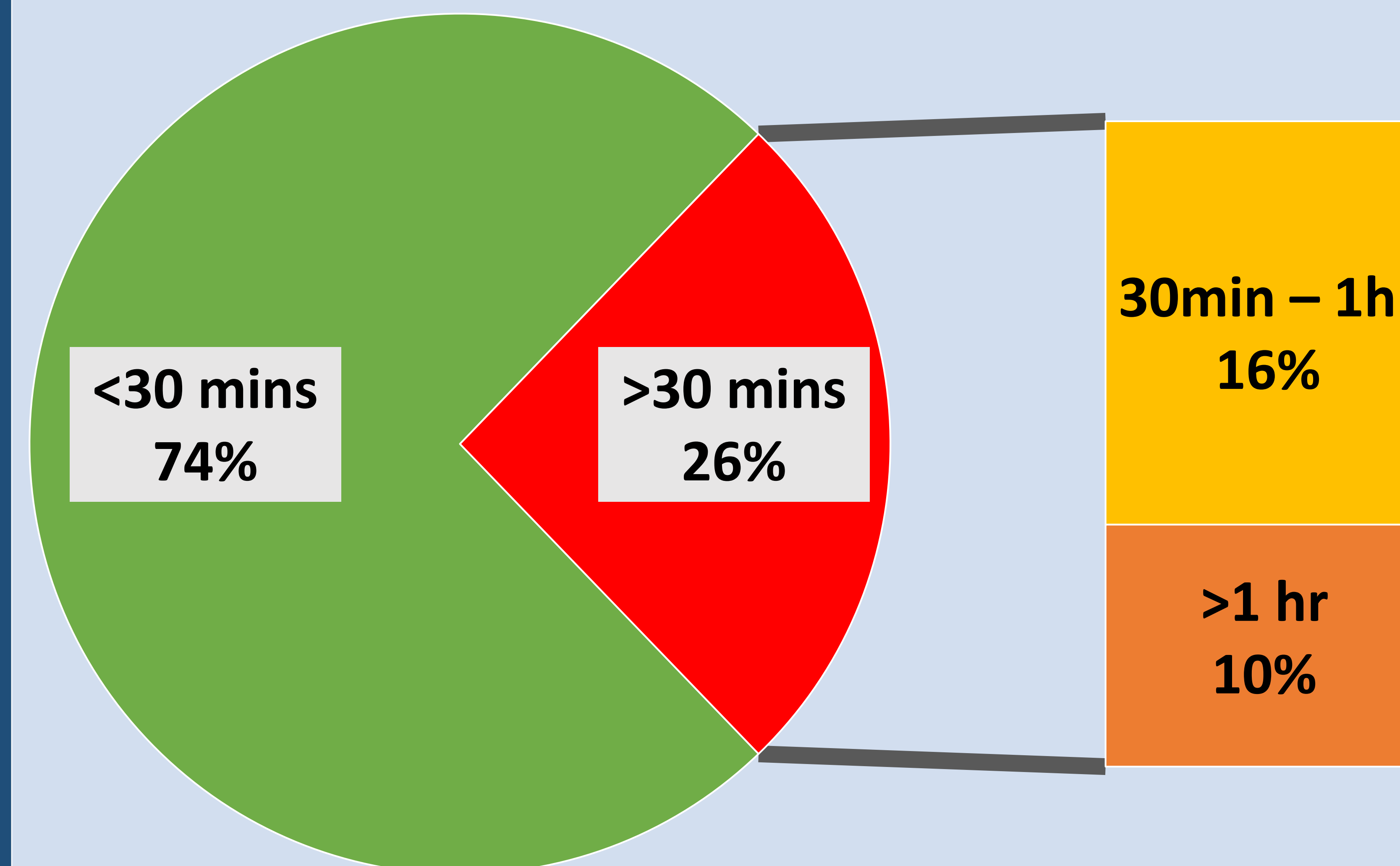
Method

All epidurals inserted on labour suite across 2 campuses in January 2023 were reviewed. Data was collected from midwives' and anaesthetists' documentation and the Trusts' management systems:

- Time anaesthetist contacted and arrived
- Reasons for delays
- Obstetric theatre activity and staffing levels

Results

Attendance Timings and Delays



- 125 epidurals inserted in January 2023, 62 at QMC and 61 at City Campus.
- Of the delayed cases:
 - 69% were out of hours.
 - 56% coincided with theatre activity.

Documentation

- 51% of anaesthetists do not document time contacted and time attended at all.
- 60% of midwives fully document time contacted and time attended.
- The reason for delay was documented in 65% of delayed cases.
- No documentation of whether delayed cases were escalated.

Conclusion

- An approved escalation policy needs to be ratified for when the delay for an epidural is unavoidable.
- Education of MDT on new, shorter quality standard for anaesthesia attendance and need for better documentation of timings and reasons for delays.
- Regular re-audit to assess need for increase in resident staffing levels.
- GPAS 2023 ⁽¹⁾ has serious implications nationally to anaesthetic staffing.

References

(1) Chapter 9: Guidelines for the Provision of Anaesthesia Services for an Obstetric Population 2023, Royal College of Anaesthetists. <http://rcoa.ac.uk/gpas/chapter-9>