HAPPY 60TH BIRTHDAY NHS

First Minister Rhodri Morgan today kicked off a week’s celebrations marking the 60th anniversary of the NHS.

They said that the hard work of staff, together with investment and reform, had led to significant achievements in improving patient care and reducing waiting times.

The First Minister said: “The NHS has come a long way since we celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1998.

“There’s no doubt that the continued hard work of staff, together with investment and reform, has made a huge difference to the quality of care that patients now receive.

“Scientific breakthroughs and faster treatment mean diseases that would have been fatal many years ago are now manageable and seeing improved survival rates.

“Cancer patients in Wales are now treated faster than ever, with virtually every patient referred as an urgent case treated within the two month target – and those referred for another condition but subsequently diagnosed with cancer treated within one month.

“In June 1998, there were more than 9,000 patients waiting over 12 months for inpatient or daycase treatment, with more than 2,700 of those waiting over 18 months.

“The latest figures show that, with a handful of exceptions, everyone is now treated within 22 weeks – once they have had their outpatient appointment and their diagnostic tests – with many treated much quicker.

“By the end of next year, no-one will wait more than 26 weeks for the entire patient journey from GP referral, through diagnostic tests, to treatment.

“And let’s not forget that these improvements are being achieved against a backdrop of the service being busier than ever before, with patients coming into contact with the NHS 22 million times every year.

“The NHS is frequently a target for criticism, but every day – and this week in particular – we should celebrate its achievements, its successes and the sheer hard work it does to ensure that every day thousands of lives in Wales are either saved or changed for the better.
“We can often become complacent about how lucky we are to have a publicly-funded, free at the point of need health service – unlike so many other developed nations.

“Everyone who lives in the UK owes our own Aneurin Bevan a huge debt of gratitude for having the remarkable foresight and courage to introduce the NHS 60 years ago.

“The NHS today is a lot different from the NHS of 10 years ago, and vastly different to the NHS that Bevan founded in 1948. It has adapted and modernised, as any public service must, to meet the challenges of today and it will have to do so again to meet those of the future.

“However, as we celebrate its 60th anniversary, we can be proud in Wales that the founding principles that Bevan established are as dear today as they were in 1948, as evident through our policies such as free prescriptions.”

**Notes to editors:**

1. Five quick facts about the NHS in Wales

   - The NHS annual budget now stands at more than £5bn – almost double the 1999/2000 figure. Investment in new hospitals and equipment alone now stands at £315 million.
   - There’s been a 33 per cent increase in the numbers of people employed by the NHS since 1997. Around 90,000 people now work in the NHS – around one in every 15 people in employment in Wales.
   - This includes 50,000 nurses, midwives and health visitors – with almost one in every two NHS staff belonging in this sector. Recruitment of student nurses is the best in the UK and the number of doctors and dentists has more than doubled.
   - Patients in Wales come into contact with the NHS some 22 million times each year, with 8 out of 10 contacts taking place outside of a hospital.
   - Every year, NHGS Wales undertakes more than 700,000 first outpatient appointments, more than 600,000 inpatient treatments and day-cases, more than a million people are seen in A&E, almost 54 million items are prescribed, and there are more than 655,000 eye tests carried out.

   A list of 60 fascinating facts about the NHS – one to mark each year of its existence – is published on the Welsh Assembly Government website today at [www.wales.gov.uk](http://www.wales.gov.uk)

2. For media enquiries only, contact the Welsh Assembly Government Press Office on 029 2089 8012/8890 or 029 2082 1823. Public enquiries to: 0845 010 3300 (English) or 0845 010 4400 (Welsh).