

Patients will have to book a spot at A&E by autumn

Kat Lay Health Correspondent

Plans for patients to “call first” and book into A&E via NHS 111 will be implemented before December, NHS bosses were told yesterday.

A joint board meeting of NHS England and NHS Improvement was told that new emergency care standards designed to replace the four-hour waiting time target would also be in place before winter.

The plans were described as a

“profound change” by Lord Prior of Brampton, chairman of NHS England. Hospitals will be asked to adapt “rapidly” to the measures, which have yet to be finalised, and make improvements as they learn how they work in practice during autumn, board papers said.

Siva Anandaciva, chief analyst at the King's Fund, a health think tank, told the Health Service Journal that “rapidly changing how A&E performance is measured during autumn will be no mean feat”, particularly while

preparing for a potential second wave of Covid-19.

The Royal College of Emergency Medicine and other royal colleges gave their backing this month to the four-hour target being dropped.

“The roll-out of new standards would need to be part of the wider transformation of urgent and emergency services,” the joint board said.

Pauline Philip, national director of urgent and emergency care, told the meeting that pilots of plans for people

to book appointments at an A&E by calling 111 were going well. She said: “Over the course of the coming weeks and months what we’re really doing is introducing something like a different ‘social norm’: that people traditionally have accessed emergency care by turning up in an emergency department, and now we’re saying there are better ways of doing this.”

There will be an increase in the number of clinical advisers and call handlers at the 111 service.

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