

Andy Burnham promises to overhaul NHS targets

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Health secretary Andy Burnham has promised to “deep clean the target regime”.

Speaking at the NHS Confederation conference, he said patients should now be the “pre-eminent force” driving health policy instead.

“It offers the chance to change the debate about targets fundamentally,” he said.

Existing targets would either be converted into minimum standards for services or “removed”, he said.

“We have got to make sure that minimum standards are fairer and more focused on local context than the targets that preceded them.”

He gave the example of the MRSA target, saying it was important that standards were high, but a national target was “no comfort” to patients in areas where their local hospital was not up to standard.

“We need a standard that reassures patients and better reflects the different challenges that different core settings face,” he said.

His announcement came as HSJ revealed managers are to be consulted on a “zero tolerance” objective on MRSA to be in the next operating framework.

Mr Burnham said the new standard would be based on clear evidence and developed in consultation with staff. The national quality board will advise on its development “starting with an engagement process from today”.

Waiting times targets such as 18 weeks and four hours in accident and emergency are also expected to become minimum service standards.