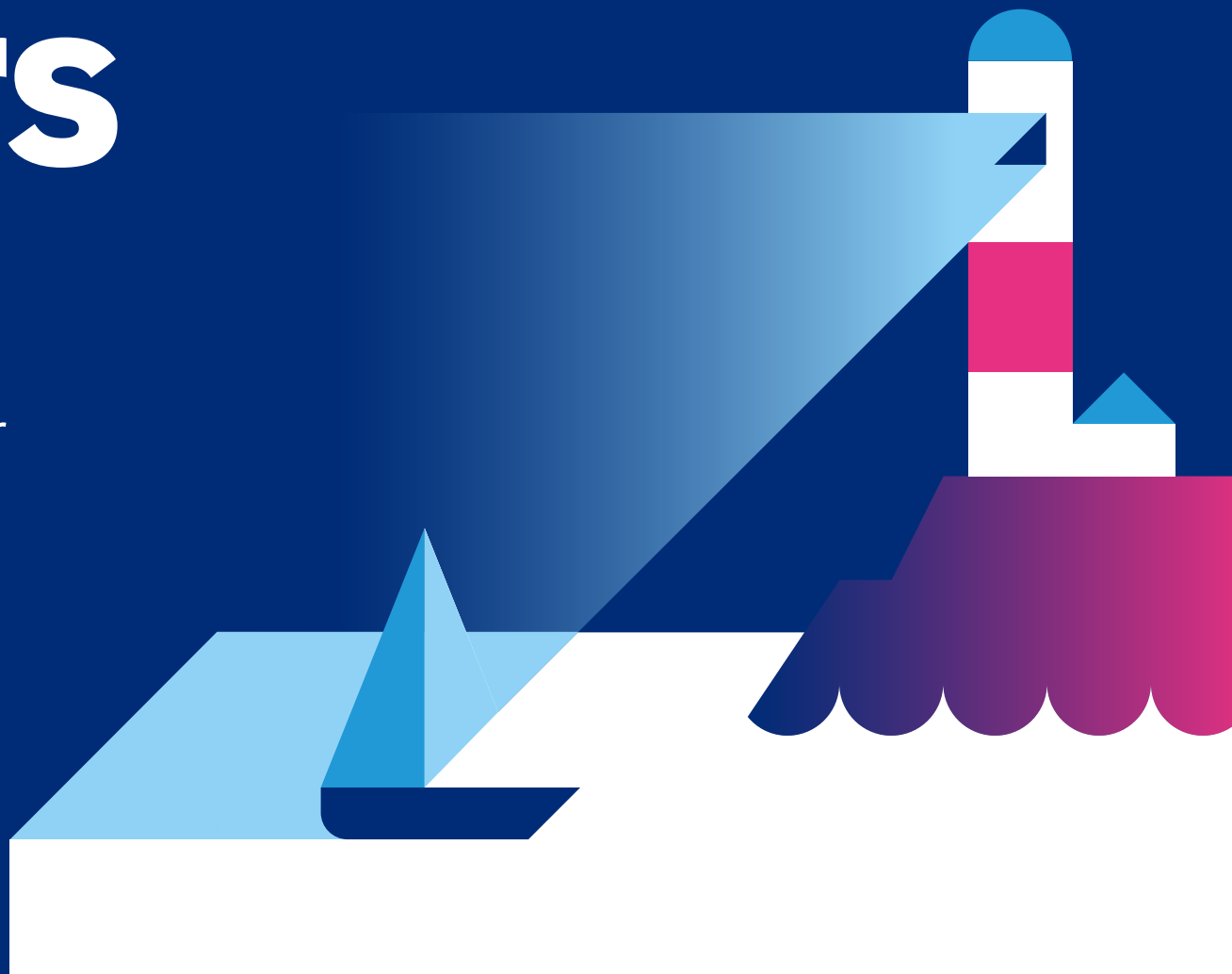


your wealth
matters

Mercer Private Wealth newsletter

Issue 8 | Summer 2023





Contents



Steve Sands,
Partner and Mercer
Private Wealth UK Leader

NHS waiting times are getting longer, with 7.4 million people in England currently on a list for treatment, according to the latest data.¹ Some 371,000 patients have been waiting more than 12 months — a number 292 times higher than before the pandemic — due to a variety of factors including budget cuts, industrial action and Covid-19.

The impact on people's health and general wellbeing is clear, but there are other, less obvious issues too. Waiting for treatment may not only exacerbate a medical condition, but can also create anxiety. Patients often worry about "falling between the cracks" as the NHS struggles to keep pace with the volume and complexity of a nation's conditions. A suspected "hidden backlog" of patients who have either not presented

or had referrals cancelled due to the lingering impact of the pandemic, could also add to the numbers of those needing care.

All this uncertainty can complicate wider life choices, including important financial decisions such as deciding when to retire or downsize. There is a way to take back control, though.

Once relatively rare in the UK, there has been a growing appetite for private medical insurance (PMI). In April, YouGov² reported that one in eight Britons (13%) had used private healthcare in the previous 12 months.

Read on to hear from Katie Cook (Head of Consumer Healthcare for Mercer Marsh Benefits) as she looks further into how you can ensure your health is taken care of, and who to go to should you require any more information.

We also examine the ongoing risk of financial fraud, identity theft, the key indicators to look out for and how

Mercer are doing all they can to protect you and your family from such attacks. As the cost-of-living crisis continues to affect many in the UK and financial vulnerability increases, there is a corresponding increase in the number of fraudsters trying to take advantage of those in challenging circumstances. The increasingly imaginative ways that fraudsters will use in order to access your money means that virtually anyone can be impacted by a scam. There is no profile of a typical fraud victim and everyone is at risk. Please read on to hear from Nick Eade, Mercer Private Wealth's Head of Operations on how you can protect yourself from cyber attacks and becoming financially vulnerable.



Katie Cook,
Head of Consumer Healthcare
Mercer Marsh Benefits UK

Time is an important factor when considering one's health, and not only for critical or life-threatening issues. Those nearing retirement or who have already left behind demanding careers may want to dedicate more time to family and loved ones, or simply embrace their life to the fullest.

Waiting months for hip-replacement surgery could keep a patient from going on a holiday of a lifetime, keeping fit, walking a loved one down the aisle or being able to dance at a wedding, adding to the frustration and anxiety that could cause a drop in both overall and mental health. According to the most recent data,³ there were approximately 410,983 people in England waiting more than 52 weeks for planned treatment, such as hip or knee replacements.

Private Medical Insurance (PMI) is providing millions with the healthcare services they need, at a time that suits them, while also easing the burden on a strained NHS. The private and public healthcare systems co-exist for the benefit of patients, and many consultants and specialists work across both.

Like any financial product, PMI can play a role in a person's holistic financial plan. Packages can be tailored to the individual, helping ensure benefits are well-suited for their and their loved ones' unique requirements.

PMI is much more than just a way of accessing healthcare more efficiently. Having the right cover in place can help us all be prepared for the future, embedding greater security into financial affairs and giving peace of mind.

For many, PMI is one solution to the unpredictability of life.

Plan with confidence

PMI has become a tool to help people plan for the future with greater confidence, allowing them to think about their finances and pursue the lifestyles they want. It can also offer greater control over managing the processes around health and wellbeing, allowing people to live their life on their terms, with treatment and attention at a time and a place that most closely meets their needs.

To find out more about the role PMI can play in a holistic financial plan, please reach out to your financial planner who will put you in contact with someone from the team.



Nick Eade,
Head of Advisory Operations
Mercer Private Wealth UK

With around 40 million adults targeted by scammers in the first quarter of 2023 alone, according to Citizens Advice,⁴ it is vitally important that you remain vigilant when dealing with people regarding your money.

The good news is that you can take precautions to protect yourself and Citizens Advice suggests looking out for a number of key warning signs:

- **An offer that seems too good to be true.** Scammers lure consumers in with promises of cheap deals or high returns. If something seems too good to be true, it probably is.
- **Communications that don't appear genuine.** It's common for scammers to impersonate legitimate organisations such as energy companies or government bodies. If in doubt, get in touch with the company directly to check if the communication really is from them.
- **You are being pressured to act quickly.** One tactic scammers use is putting pressure on their victims to act quickly, with promises of time-limited deals, or warnings of negative consequences if action isn't taken. If you are being asked to transfer money or provide personal details urgently, you may be the target of a scam.
- **You are being asked to use an unusual payment method.** If an organisation you have dealt with in the past is asking you to pay in a new way — such as transferring money to an account you don't recognise, or using a new payment link — the request may not be legitimate.
- **You have been asked to provide personal information.** If you receive an email or text message asking you for information such as a PIN or password, do not provide it. Genuine companies will not ask you to send these details over text or email.



One tactic scammers use is putting pressure on their victims to act quickly, with promises of time-limited deals, or warnings of negative consequences.



Financial fraud

In addition to the above, there is a national awareness campaign called "Take Five", which is backed by UK finance establishments and the government. This urges you to stop and consider whether a request to provide personal or financial information is genuine and whether what you're being told really makes sense.

Remember, Mercer, your bank or the police will never:

- Phone and ask you for your PIN or full banking password, even by tapping them into your phone keypad.
- Ask you to withdraw money to hand over for safe-keeping.
- Ask you to transfer money to a safe account, even in your name, for fraud reasons.
- Send someone to your home to collect cash, PIN, cards or cheque books if you are a victim of fraud.
- Ask you to purchase goods using your card and then hand them over for safe-keeping.

As noted above, if you are ever in doubt that an email or text is legitimate, contact the company the message claims to be from directly. Make sure you get in touch using the organisation's official channels rather than details provided in the suspicious message



How does Mercer protect you against financial crime?



Nick Eade,
Head of Advisory Operations
Mercer Private Wealth UK

The connection between all of the above is your own personal and financial data, as without that a fraudster will find it very difficult to access your assets

Keeping your data safe should be of the highest priority not only for you, but also for the people who act for you; at Mercer, how we manage your data has always been vitally important.

Naturally, we will need information about your personal and financial circumstances in order to provide you with advice, but whenever that data is transferred between us, any related third parties or is stored on our system, we have robust procedures in place to minimise the risk to both you and us.

Stringent processes and staff awareness

Our commitment to keeping your data safe starts with our direct dealings with you.

Where we are required to request or share data with you, or any related third party, our processes require that to be fully encrypted either end to end, or via secure password protection.

We also require all colleagues to complete annual information security and privacy training, and conduct regular phishing awareness campaigns to support colleagues in identifying and reporting phishing.



How do Mercer protect you against financial crime?

Review of third-party providers

We have procedures in place to assess the information and cyber-security practices of third-party providers (e.g. insurance companies, subcontractors and vendors).

We utilise questionnaires, meetings and inspections as appropriate and in line with applicable legal and regulatory requirements. Access to data or company systems by such third parties is permitted only after completion of a risk assessment and periodic re-assessments of a third party's security measures are performed using a risk-based approach.

Review of third-party contracts and service agreements can include review by our legal and compliance, information security, IT internal audit, and other teams as appropriate. Upon such review, contracts will include security and privacy terms and conditions commensurate with the types of services provided by the third party (including contract and temporary personnel).

Data-security programme

Once your data is on our systems, our vigilance does not end there. Our cyber-security programme focuses on **prevention, detection and response**.

Prevention

Within Mercer we have a number of mechanisms in place to prevent data security breaches, including:

- The segregation of areas of our network to protect client and company information
- Endpoint detection of viruses and threats
- Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA) for externally facing applications and Data at Rest Encryption (DARE) for applications with restricted or confidential data
- Annual network penetration tests and threat hunts of our network infrastructure

Detection

We monitor company systems and our network continuously for system performance, availability and to detect intrusion attempts.

System and security event logs are enabled to capture events including success or failure of login attempts, account creation or modification activities, and we also have a dedicated cyber security incident response team for incidents that impact client data and personal information.

The cyber-security incident response team is responsible for defining relevant IT security incident response actions, providing direction to responder teams, conducting forensics investigations, and working with the privacy team (and as needed, with other internal functional areas such as HR, legal and compliance, IT and operations) to support external notification procedures.

How do Mercer protect you against financial crime?

Response

We have a dedicated cyber-security incident-response team for incidents that impact client data and personal information.

The cyber-security incident-response team is responsible for defining relevant IT-security incident- response actions, providing direction to responder teams, conducting forensics investigations, and working with the Privacy team (and as needed, with other key internal functional areas) to support external notification procedures.

Your data plays a vital role in enabling us to provide you with the advice you need, but the above should reassure you that we treat the collation and storage of this information with the utmost respect in order to minimize the risks of cyber crime. In short, we act as if that data were our own.



Endnotes

¹ BMA, NHS Backlog Data Analysis. Available at <https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/nhs-delivery-and-workforce/pressures/nhs-backlog-data-analysis>

² YouGov. 17 April 2023. <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/health/articles-reports/2023/04/17/one-eight-britons-turned-private-healthcare-last-1>

³ Healthwatch, 8 December 2022. <https://www.healthwatch.co.uk/response/2022-12-08/our-response-latest-nhs-elective-care-waiting-times>

⁴ Citizens Advice, 12 June 2022. "Over 40 million..." Available at <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/about-us/about-us1/media/press-releases/over-40-million-targeted-by-scammers-as-the-cost-of-living-crisis-bites/>

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