



# Transforming and delivering: How NHS Wales has adopted new ways of working in response to COVID-19

## Introduction

The challenges brought about by the COVID-19 outbreak have meant the NHS in Wales has adopted new and innovative methods of service delivery. Staff are working across the system, from intensive care units (ICUs), GP practices, ambulance services, mental health support services and social care services to meet the needs of the people of Wales. In this briefing, the fifth in this series, we highlight some of the transformation taking place across Wales that is ensuring patients have continued access to services and staff feel supported in their work.

COVID-19 has not gone away and it is important that we don't lose the progress we've made. NHS Wales organisations recognise this and have continued to work across the public, private, third and voluntary sectors to deliver new care models to support local populations to stay healthy, active and independent while also keeping them safe from COVID-19. Much of the service change has harnessed the potential of technology to improve access to patient care. The scale of the transformation we've seen, and the pace at which it has been delivered, is a demonstration of an enormous national, cross-sector and compassionate response to the challenges we face.

Innovations such as an Artificial Intelligence (AI)-powered chatbot in Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board (UHB), developed in conjunction with IBM's Watson Health AI engine, address the increased expectation for instant and remote healthcare, providing access to trusted information. Meanwhile in Powys Teaching Health Board, the roll-out of the midwife-led post-natal contraception service is improving access to sexual health and contraception services in rural areas.

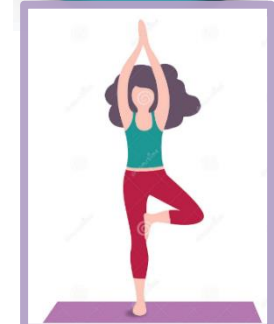
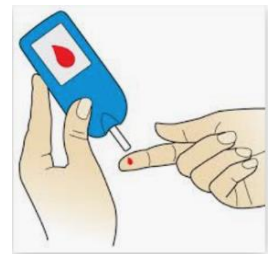
These transformations have led to a significant increase in the number of people accessing non-COVID services across Wales. We want to see this trend continue and provide further assurance to the public the NHS is safe and here for those who need it. If you require urgent medical attention, particularly emergency care, please do come forward.

Nobody can deny the scale of the challenge the NHS in Wales is facing, and we recognise the importance of building on innovative care models not only to support safe access to services, but also to be better prepared for what lies ahead. It is hoped that the work highlighted here will inspire us to think about what we can do to help people requiring support and share learning across the health and care sectors.

### **Maintaining staff wellbeing during COVID-19**

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board (UHB) has taken a proactive approach to maintaining the physical and mental wellbeing of staff through a targeted wellbeing strategy. The strategy includes:

- **Establishing a specialist maternity services COVID-19 social media group**, which enables staff to remain connected, have a safe space to share thoughts, support colleagues with coping strategies and build confidence.
- Developing a **clinical skills programme**, which has been delivered to over 1,000 staff returning to frontline clinical areas during the pandemic. The programme includes a range of self-care strategies, early identification of wellbeing changes and guidance on where to seek additional support.
- **Supporting and mentoring around 330 student nurses** to ensure they were delegated appropriate clinical tasks and that their new role was contributing to their specific learning outcomes.
- **Delivering maternity group yoga sessions for maternity services staff**, which are offered at the end of a clinical shift. Sessions adhere to strict social distancing measures and focus on deep relaxation, mindfulness, stretching and toning.



The Health Board conducted its first Wellbeing Survey in June 2020 with over 2,000 members of staff. Overwhelmingly, staff felt that they and their colleagues were coping well, but the organisation is committed to continually improving these experiences over the coming months. The survey found positive feedback from staff around support they've received from line managers, changes to working patterns, having more space for breaks and knowing where to go for help and support should they need it.

### **Joined-up North Wales vascular service cuts surgical waits**

Improved teamwork and a North Wales-wide approach to scheduling surgery and service redesign has meant staff at Betsi Cadwaladr UHB have significantly reduced waiting times for vascular surgeries, despite COVID-19 pressures.

Under the new service model for vascular patients, improved co-ordination between teams at North Wales' three main hospitals has reduced the number of people waiting for arteriovenous fistula surgery. By maximising resources and available theatre time, the number of patients waiting for surgery dropped from 116 to 41 between June 2019 and 2020. The procedure joins a vein to an artery to create a fistula, which is the recommended way for dialysis patients to receive their medication.

Before the introduction of the new model of care for vascular services, surgical lists for patients needing arteriovenous fistula surgery were managed separately on each hospital site. By combining resources across North Wales, patients are now accessing surgery faster. Greater teamwork with colleagues in radiology and nephrology in the three main hospitals is also helping to achieve better outcomes for patients following surgery.

As well as improving the position on people waiting for surgery, the team has worked hard to continue to deliver services with as few interruptions as possible during the COVID-19 outbreak. Vascular operating services continued at Glan Clwyd Hospital - one of five theatres that remained open. Day case arteriovenous fistula surgery also continued at Ysbyty Gwynedd and Wrexham Maelor Hospital. The work of Vascular Access Specialist Nurses at the three hospitals has also continued, supporting the co-ordination of services across the three sites, assessing patients who require a simple fistula as well as providing follow-up care.



**Cardiff and  
Vale  
University  
Health Board**

**Service introduced in South Wales can reduce the risk of oesophageal cancer**

The COVID-19 pandemic has meant NHS organisations have had to think innovatively about how to deliver critical services to those who need them most. As well as delivering significant adaptations to NHS cancer services to ensure they are delivered safely and within COVID-free environments, Cardiff and Vale UHB has continued to deliver on its commitment to improving cancer services for the population of South Wales, the latest example of which is the Barrett's Radiofrequency Ablation (RFA) Service.

The South Wales Barrett's RFA service, which started in May 2020 and is housed within Cardiff and Vale UHB, has already seen 30 referrals to date, all of which involve patients who developed consequences of long-term Barrett's oesophagus. Barrett's oesophagus is a condition where the lining of the lower part of the oesophagus changes to a lining similar to the stomach, which is widely recognised as being a pre-cancerous condition.

The cause of the condition is not known but it is believed that many years of acid reflux from the stomach into the oesophagus causes injury to the lining of the oesophagus, known as oesophagitis. In some people, this inflammation may lead to damage of the oesophagus cells and progress through a series of stages to oesophageal cancer. In normal circumstances the oesophagus heals and returns to normal but sometimes the oesophagus does not heal in the usual way. This is where patients require treatment as part of the RFA service.

It is estimated that approximately 58 patients will be treated through the South Wales Barrett's RFA Service at University Hospital Llandough this year, and an estimated 17 patients in North Wales will continue to be referred to the service in Liverpool. The service covers six of the seven Health Boards, offering treatment to around 2.5 million people.



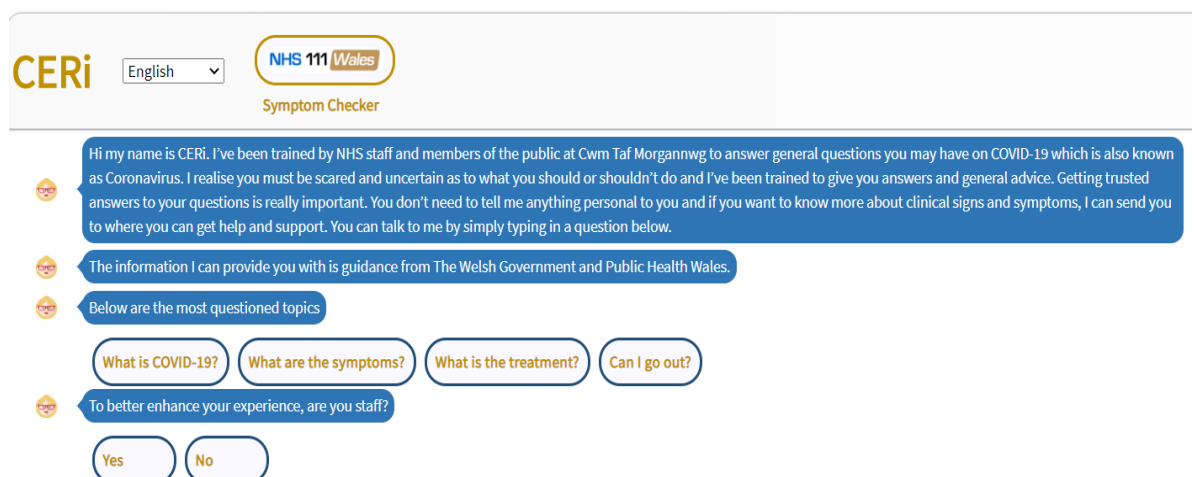
**Supporting staff and patients to access the information they need through an AI-powered chatbot, CERi**

Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB has worked with IBM’s Watson Health artificial intelligence (AI) engine to produce and launch a chatbot that provides the most up to date information about COVID-19, including around treatment and prevention, to members of staff and the general public. Known as CERi, the innovation is an example of how Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB is adjusting and evolving its services during the pandemic, addressing the increased expectation for instant and remote healthcare and access to trusted information.

Crucially, the information it provides is based exclusively on guidance and advice from trusted sources (e.g. Welsh Government and Public Health Wales NHS Trust) and the programme is designed to continuously learn new information based on the interactions it has with users.

Moreover, CERi has been programmed to detect the user’s emotional state as they seek advice. The system can detect whether the user is agitated, embarrassed, frightened or depressed and responds accordingly. Using this intelligence, the system not only provides robust advice, but also empathises with the user.

The CERi system reduces demand on the 111 Service (which is a free-to-call non-emergency medical helpline) and is capable of providing information and guidance in Welsh, should the user prefer. Among the benefits of seeking advice from a chatbot is that the user effectively remains anonymous, which means they’re more likely to seek advice on topics that they may be uncomfortable speaking about with a healthcare professional.



**Health  
Education and  
Improvement  
Wales (HEIW)**

**Using technology to support pharmacists throughout the COVID-19 pandemic**

A new training programme has been developed by Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) to support pharmacy technicians to administer medicine during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The new programme will allow pharmacy technicians to provide additional support to the workforce during this period and work competently within care settings. Comprising e-learning knowledge and observed assessment of competencies within the care setting, the programme recognises that delivery in different sectors and settings is diverse and does not attempt to prescribe one single model for the delivery of the administration of medicines.

To be considered for the training programme, pharmacy technicians must be registered with the General Pharmaceutical Council (GPhC) and have access to an educational supervisor who is approved to administer medicines or a pharmacy technician who has completed the programme already. Further information can be found [here](#).

**New MedTRiM Resilience and Wellbeing online courses available to all NHS staff during COVID-19 pandemic**

New online blended courses are available to support the ongoing psychological resilience and wellbeing of NHS staff in Wales during the COVID response. The courses allow previous NHS staff attendees to revise their Medical Trauma Resilience Management (MedTRiM) training, while restrictions to normal working practices are in place. Further information is available [here](#).

MedTRiM was developed several years ago by Dr Mark Stacey, Consultant Anesthetist and Associate Dean (New Initiatives at HEIW) in collaboration with Professor Andy McCann and Steve Eaton MBE of DNA Definitive. The courses have achieved international interest with well over 1,200 clinicians attending the training courses from across the UK. The course material provides a strategy for dealing with potentially harmful healthcare associated events and a variety of skills to enhance wellbeing.

As well as learning how to implement the MedTRiM Organisation Management approach, the course emphasises the need for self-care and a range of evidence-based wellbeing strategies that were specifically developed for the courses.

### **Respiratory patients encouraged to join new online service**

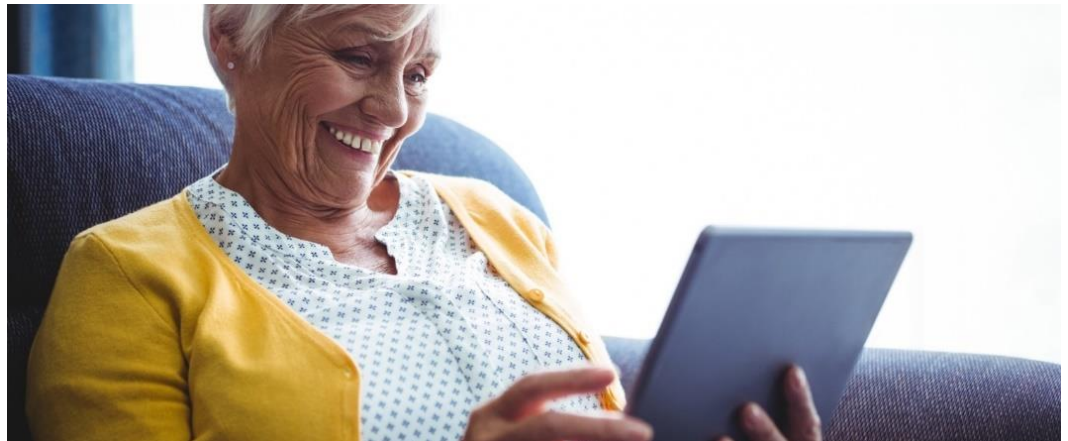
The COVID-19 pandemic has meant staff at Hywel Dda UHB have had to think innovatively about how they can deliver vital NHS services remotely. The latest development, which has been accelerated by the introduction of infection control measures as a result of COVID-19, is the launch of Patients Know Best (PKB).

PKB is a new online service designed to improve patient experience and access to NHS services and information. It is a secure UK-based system that allows patients to access information in relation to their health anywhere, at any time, and puts the patient in control of their medical data. Patient records are encrypted so that only the user and those with permission can access it.

The system also provides a secure online space for patients to view appointment letters, track and monitor their health and symptoms, and access a library of health resources that support people to manage their conditions, stay healthy and stay independent.

Chief Executive of Hywel Dda UHB, Steve Moore, said: *"It is fantastic to be able to offer this new online service for our respiratory patients and we hope to roll this out to other services as soon as possible. Making better use of technology to enable our patients to access care and information has been a key priority of ours and has only been accelerated by the pandemic".*

Patient feedback on PKB has included: *"Really useful and easy to use and a great way to check in when advice needed"* and *"The PKB app is a most useful tool, easy to use, and to be able to communicate with professional people is a great help."*





## **NHS Wales Informatics Services (NWIS)**

### **Antibody test results recorded on mobile devices thanks to digital innovation**

NHS Wales Informatics Service (NWIS) has developed an application that allows Health Boards in Wales to record the results of lateral flow antibody tests for citizens in Wales on a mobile device.

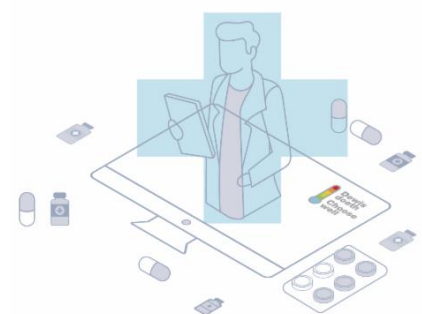
The application has already been used by Cardiff and Vale UHB to record the results of more than 8,000 teachers in Cardiff and the Vale of Glamorgan for the COVID-19 antibody lateral flow test. Lateral flow tests can detect the presence of the COVID-19 antibodies using a small liquid sample without the need for specialised and costly laboratory equipment and resource. Using the application, the results are entered digitally and recorded into a database and citizens are notified of the result immediately.

NWIS are in talks about rolling out the application to Swansea Bay UHB, Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB and Betsi Cadwaladr UHB.

### **New digital service supports local pharmacy prescribing**

A new module of the Choose Pharmacy application, the Independent Prescribers' Service (IPS), will support community pharmacists who have qualified as non-medical prescribers to provide patients presenting with certain conditions access to effective advice and treatment. The IPS is part of the expanding Choose Pharmacy digital platform, developed by NWIS, which includes services such as emergency contraception, a common ailments service and discharge medicine reviews.

The service will enable pharmacists to record the consultation, generate a GP summary and/or referral letters and create a patient history, which moves with the patient if they change pharmacies. To inform decisions, pharmacists who have qualified as non-medical prescribers will have access to the patient's digital Welsh GP record. This includes a summary of important information, such as current medication, recent tests and allergies.



NWIS will go on to conduct a pathfinder evaluation towards the end of this year, which will inform recommendations on national rollout.

**Powys  
Teaching  
Health Board**

**Redesigning services to improve patient access to sexual health services**

More women than ever before now have better access to contraception following roll-out of the midwife-led postnatal contraception service in Powys.

Access to sexual health and contraception services can be challenging in rural areas, and since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, these challenges have been made more acute as a result of the sharp reduction in the number of face-to-face appointments available. To address this challenge, staff at Powys Teaching Health Board came up with a new way of working.

Powys Sexual Health Team has worked closely with the midwifery service to develop a local midwife-led service. Following an initial pilot scheme, midwife-led contraception has now been increased to include all midwifery teams across the Health Board.

All midwives who have completed the Faculty of Sexual and Reproductive Healthcare (FSRH) Essential Skills training course have been provided with the necessary guidelines and support to facilitate the administration of Depo-Provera contraceptive injections or a 6-month supply of a progesterone-only pill to women. This enables women who are suitable to commence these methods to be provided with contraception during a routine midwifery visit prior to discharge from the service. Where women choose not to access this method, midwifery teams have been provided with a supply of condoms which can be distributed to service users.

This provides a vital service for rural communities during COVID-19 alongside the expansion of the Test and Post Service for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Powys Sexual Health Service has been working with Public Health Wales NHS Trust, Signum Health and Health Boards across Wales to increase access to STI screening through this Welsh Government-funded project.



**Public Health  
Wales NHS  
Trust**

**Health Foundation funding for a Networked Data Lab for Population Health and Healthcare in Wales**

Public Health Wales NHS Trust will receive funding of up to £400,000 over two years to join a national network of experts who are working to address some of the biggest challenges facing health and care today, both nationally and in Wales.

The Networked Data Lab (NDL) is a new Health Foundation initiative to build a collaborative network of analytical teams across the UK and use linked datasets to produce insights on critical areas of importance to population health, including addressing challenges associated with COVID-19 and health inequalities.

After a highly competitive process, Public Health Wales, along with partners NHS Wales Informatics Service (NWIS), Swansea University and Social Care Wales, has been awarded one of five NDLS across England, Scotland and Wales until December 2022.

NDL Wales consists of a small team embedded within the Research and Development Division, Knowledge Directorate, which will draw on the linked data within the SAIL Databank and the National Data Resource in NWIS. Public Health Wales will focus specifically on; sharing knowledge; statistical, analytical and epidemiological skills and expertise; and sharing experiences working with complex linked data with the other NDLS and the Health Foundation.

Within Wales, the programme will help to accelerate the search for a more in-depth understanding of highly relevant health challenges. Public Health Wales will optimise the use of routine data to address health, prevention and inequalities across generations, and produce valuable insights to inform decisions to improve population health.



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## The Networked Data Lab

A collaborative network of analytical teams across the UK working together using linked datasets on key issues facing health and care services today.





 Copy link



### **Plasma therapy could be used to help COVID-19 patients at Morriston Hospital**

Antibodies from people who have recovered from COVID-19 could be given to current COVID patients in intensive care at Morriston Hospital in Swansea Bay UHB.

The therapy, known as convalescent plasma, has already been introduced in two urgent public health research studies taking place in Wales, alongside the treatments they are already trialling. Researchers are hoping that the antibodies, contained within plasma collected from people who have recovered or are recovering from the virus, could help critically ill patients, as well as other patients with confirmed COVID-19 that are not currently in intensive care.

Swansea Bay UHB is one of six Welsh Health Boards participating in the two UK-wide studies, REMAP-CAP and RECOVERY. REMAP-CAP is a platform trial for severely ill patients with COVID-19, and tests multiple treatments at the same time. These treatments include antiviral therapy, immune modulation therapy, therapeutic anticoagulation and, now, convalescent plasma.

Convalescent plasma has also been introduced into the RECOVERY trial. This tests if existing or new treatments can help a wider range of patients, not just those in intensive care, including those who have been admitted to hospital wards with confirmed COVID-19. It's the largest trial of its kind in the world and the Health Board has recruited dozens of patients admitted to both Morriston and Singleton Hospitals.

No patients have yet been identified as suitable for convalescent plasma in Morriston ITU since the therapy was introduced at the end of June. Staff, however, have been fully trained in readiness, and all the other treatments available within REMAP-CAP have been used.

So far, 28 patients across Wales have taken part in the trial, 11 of them at Morriston – making the hospital Wales's highest recruiting centre.



**Bridgend COVID-19 field hospital to host lifesaving blood donation sessions**

A unique collaboration between the Welsh Blood Service, which is hosted by Velindre University NHS Trust, and Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB has seen a COVID-19 field hospital in Bridgend being used to collect vital whole blood donations throughout August.

The 400-bed field hospital, located at the site of the old Harman Becker unit in Bridgend, was rapidly established at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic to provide extra bed capacity if required by local hospitals.

Due to current low levels of hospital admissions of COVID-19 in the area, the field hospital has been repurposed to provide facilities for a number of non-COVID related medical services. On a number of dates throughout August 2020, the venue has hosted local blood donors rolling up their sleeves to make their lifesaving blood donations. Blood stock levels have remained healthy throughout the pandemic thanks to the overwhelming support from new and existing blood donors across Wales.

To access the Welsh Blood Service’s website and find out more about giving blood during the COVID-19 pandemic, see [here](#).

Alan Prosser, Director of the Welsh Blood Service said: *“We’ve made significant changes to the service to ensure we can maintain our high levels of safety throughout the pandemic, from introducing new venues that meet the latest social distancing guidelines to rolling out PPE for all staff and enhanced cleaning of our clinical environments”.*




If giving is in your blood, please help

0800 25 22 66

**Welsh Blood Service**


We have made improvements to the way donors can search for clinics and book appointments.

You will initially be presented with all clinics within 15 miles of your search location. You can then filter the results to narrow or expand the search. Within the results, you can select the dates of confirmed clinics at each venue. For clinics offering appointments, you can make an appointment directly, choosing from all available slots.

For help during the process, move your cursor or press on the button. 

These improvements are the first stage of this project. If you have any feedback regarding these improvements or suggestions for the future development then please let us know.

Postcode/ City/ Town

Postcode or Location 

Search



## Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust (WAST)

### Reconfiguring services to help vulnerable people in North Wales maintain their independence

A dedicated team of 32 volunteers are hitting the roads across North Wales to assist WAST in dealing with vulnerable people who have had a fall at home.

Based out of the Ambulance headquarters in St Asaph, the Community First Responder Falls Team has already assisted around 250 people. The team was created to use the talents and experience of the familiar Community First Responders (CFRs) who had to be stood down from their normal duties at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Providing a two-person response, 24 hours a day, the team are mobilised when a call to 999 is recognised as suitable by a clinician in the contact centre.

The team then head to the patient's address and help them back up, whilst also carrying out a risk assessment of the home, offering advice on safety measures and referral pathways.

The average attendance lasts around one hour, which means skilled volunteers are freeing up lots of time for frontline WAST crews. So far, the team has managed to keep 97% of patients in their own homes. Helping to mobilise the Falls Team has been automotive engineering firm MS-RT from Pontypool, which kindly donated a van to WAST to support the service.

The team are fully trained in the use of specialist lifting equipment such as the Mangar Camel inflatable chair and the Mangar Elk inflatable cushion to help ease patients off the ground. They're also trained in identifying particularly vulnerable patients and those who may be experiencing early onset dementia.



### **How can the Welsh NHS Confederation help you?**

The Welsh NHS Confederation is the only national membership body which represents all the organisations that make up the NHS in Wales: the seven Local Health Boards, the three NHS Trusts and Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW).

If you would like more information on this briefing, please contact our Director, Darren Hughes, [Darren.Hughes@welshconfed.org](mailto:Darren.Hughes@welshconfed.org)

You can visit our website at [www.welshconfed.org](http://www.welshconfed.org) or follow us on Twitter  [@WelshConfed](https://twitter.com/WelshConfed)