



Welsh NHS Confederation
Conffederasiwn GIG Cymru

Briefing

Transforming NHS Wales services to meet increasing demand

This briefing highlights examples of innovative practice which have taken place in recent months across NHS Wales to help respond to demand, support the population and plan for the future.

15 September 2021

Introduction

The NHS in Wales is facing some of the highest levels of demand on record. NHS organisations are having to respond to the challenges of managing the COVID-19 virus with a growing backlog of planned care and increasing demand for urgent and emergency care.

There's no single reason for the current situation, but a multitude of complex factors across the whole health and care system. In many areas we're seeing the highest levels of demand ever, combined with restricted capacity, workforce challenges, increasing patient needs and high public expectation.

While there are significant challenges across the system, there is remarkable work being done to respond to the demand and transform services to meet the current and future needs of NHS services and patients in Wales. It's important to stress that although there is pressure on services across the board, many are coping. This is, in part, thanks to inspiring staff and transformation in services resulting from the pandemic. There's much collective learning to be done and harnessing the speed and agility of service adaptation is being considered and must contribute to future ways of working.

This briefing highlights just some of the innovations NHS organisations have deployed to help respond to the demand, support the population and also plan for the future. It's important that such innovations are learnt from and taken forward as the system recovers.

Some of the innovations within this document highlight ways in which capacity challenges are being tackled directly, such as a new drive-through spirometry service at Wrexham Maelor Hospital which has increased the testing capacity by 30%. A digital transformation pilot in Cardiff and Vale University Health Board has supported the successful clearing of an 18-month-long waiting list for PrEP medicine, which reduces people's risk of getting HIV.

Others highlight how the service is still working towards a preventative approach, with care increasingly being delivered within communities, such as a Merthyr-based pilot allowing low-risk glaucoma patients to be seen in the community using UK-first technology. A gaming app has also been launched by the Welsh Ambulance Service to educate the next generation of service users.

There is no magic bullet to reduce the demand on the system overnight, but there are actions being taken to address existing pressures in the short term, whilst also looking ahead to developing a sustainable service in the future.

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

Aneurin Bevan University Health Board Apprenticeships and Kickstart

With the challenges around recruitment and retention, Aneurin Bevan University Health Board has agreed to create a new “Aneurin Bevan Apprentice” offer and establish work placements through the Department of Work and Pension Kickstart scheme.

This opportunity to offer new routes for training and employment to a wide pool of applicants will provide a genuine and sustainable investment in the future NHS and wider health sector workforce. Apprenticeship programmes and work placements are a golden opportunity to nurture talent tailored for the Health Boards’ needs and to create inclusive opportunities to support the prosperity and sustainability of local communities in line with the Wellbeing of Futures Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The apprenticeship offer will build upon the Health Board’s model that offers substantive staff the opportunity to achieve a Modern Apprenticeship qualification. The new “Aneurin Bevan Apprenticeship” training route will provide access to employment for those who specifically require additional training and experience to enter employment with the Health Board.

The Health Board has plans to initially host 30 placement opportunities. The Apprenticeship and Kick Start schemes will enhance career pathways, the widening access agenda and support talent management and succession planning.



Drive-through at Wrexham Maelor Hospital for patients with breathing difficulties increases testing capacity

A new drive-through spirometry service has opened at Wrexham Maelor Hospital to test patients with breathing difficulties, increasing the testing capacity by 30%. The service allows patients to undergo lung function tests from the comfort of their vehicle.

The clinic takes place under a marquee positioned next to the entrance of the rehabilitation unit at the Hospital. Patients, who have been referred to the drive-through by a consultant, drive in and members of staff from the respiratory physiology team carry out a COVID-19 compliant spirometry investigation through the car window. The patient is then free to leave and the results are forwarded to the referring consultant.

The respiratory physiology service has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and has lost 83% of lung function testing capacity, which includes spirometry. The drive-through has helped to increase the number of patients tested by 71% compared to before the pandemic, alongside another initiative which has improved the ventilation in the lung function clinic room.



Cardiff and Vale University Health Board

Health Board leads the way for accessing HIV precautionary medicine

A team of doctors at Cardiff and Vale University Health Board have successfully cleared an 18-month-long waiting list within a matter of months, thanks to a digital transformation pilot.

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) medicine is taken as a daily pill if you're HIV negative to reduce your risk of getting the virus. Pre-pandemic, these appointments were conducted face to face within clinical environments by a sexual health team. But during the early stages of the first lockdown, several members of the team were redeployed to COVID-specific departments to support colleagues. The team was faced with the dilemma of ensuring patients continued to receive their medicine, as well as meeting the needs of new people during a time when face-to-face appointments couldn't happen.

They agreed to move the service solely to video and telephone call appointments. The team also used Microsoft Forms to change how they communicated with current patients for follow-up appointments, which can be just as significant as initial clinic visits. Follow-ups take place every 3-6 months and are there to provide blood tests and, if negative, a repeat prescription of the medicine.



Merthyr patients pilot new local NHS glaucoma service

Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board launched a pilot service at Specsavers in Merthyr Tydfil's Market Square, to make it as easy as possible for local NHS glaucoma patients to be monitored. This new service is making sure lower risk patients are assessed at convenient, local opticians' practices, while those at higher risk will continue to attend their hospital-based eye clinics.

These lower-risk patients are assessed by an optometrist at the Merthyr Specsavers practice, with the results shared in real time with the Health Board specialist, consultant-led ophthalmology service for review. The technology being used to share patients' information is a first in the UK for eye care due to the way full scans and videos of the optic nerve, macula and visual fields are available instantly for the hospital-based specialists to review.

The plan is to roll out a similar pilot service at Davies & Jones Optometrists in Porth and Talbot Green and Mountain Ash Optical Centre. This will then be extended, subject to its success, after March next year. It is estimated around 4,000 glaucoma patients in the Cwm Taf Morgannwg area can be effectively assessed in the community.



Digital Health and Care Wales

Better access to patient information for Choose Pharmacy

Community pharmacists in Wales are to be given increased access to patients' GP medical records as part of the Choose Pharmacy service, to help them care for more people with minor illnesses. A new agreement between General Practitioners Committee (GPC) Wales and Digital Health and Care Wales means pharmacists will have access to a patient's GP record, with their consent, to support safe and effective decision-making.

Community pharmacists are already able to use the Choose Pharmacy service to access the patient's GP record to support some aspects of care, such as for emergency medication prescriptions or for use by pharmacists who are also Independent Prescribers. Choose Pharmacy is also used to record consultations, share information with relevant healthcare professionals and generate claims for payment.

Approval from GPC Wales now means Choose Pharmacy can be developed to include Welsh GP Record access in all current and future modules, with access restricted to appropriately accredited Community Pharmacy users. With many pharmacies offering a growing number of NHS services, access for qualified pharmacists to the patient's medical record is needed to ensure safe and effective care.



Health Education and Improvement Wales

£1bn in contracts awarded for Healthcare Professional Pre-Registration Education

Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) has awarded over £1bn worth of healthcare professional education contracts for delivery over the next 10 years. HEIW has undertaken its largest commissioning process for tendering and awarding contracts to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) for the delivery of modern healthcare professional pre-registration education that meets the future needs of NHS services and patients in Wales.

The contracts, which supply courses across a wide number of disciplines, including adult, children and mental health nursing, midwifery, occupational therapy, podiatry, speech and language therapy and biomedical science, will also support the workforce needs of Health Boards for the next decade.

HEIW undertook stakeholder engagement and researched international best practice, leading to several key themes being built into the contract specifications. Themes include a more local/regional approach to healthcare professional education by delivering more education closer to, or in, all Health Board areas and in some disciplines offering part time education programmes. Emphasis has also been given to recruit students from disadvantaged areas of Wales and from hard-to-reach communities. The importance of the Welsh language has also been reflected in the contracts, enabling students to learn and utilise the Welsh language.



Hywel Dda University Health Board

Mental health schemes supporting primary care services

GP Practices from across Hywel Dda University Health Board have commissioned a range of mental health support schemes to help their patients with low level mental health, isolation and loneliness. These non-clinical interventions deliver a different approach to supporting patients and are designed to improve patient's mental health and wellbeing.

Since October 2020, the Amman Gwendraeth Primary Care Cluster has successfully rolled out additional support for patients needing mental health support in eight GP practices. Mental Health Practitioners have been employed to work across all GP practices in the Cluster to advise and support patients with their mental health needs. More recently the Cluster has commissioned two mental health charities, Shadows Depression Support and The Jac Lewis Foundation, to meet the mental health needs of patients by directly providing counselling and psychotherapeutic interventions, patient education and support.

The North Ceredigion Primary Care Cluster currently fund two projects which support mental health. The HAUL Arts for Health project partners isolated and vulnerable people with a creative writer to enhance personal creativity and wellbeing. The Cluster also works with Area 43 on the Here for You online counselling service, which is available for young people aged 16 to 30.

The South Pembrokeshire Primary Care Cluster has commissioned a youth project service, jointly funded by the Cluster and the local authority education service, for children and young people aged 8 to 18. The service supports extended family members to help the child recover from emotional distress. The Cluster also commissions an Area 43 online short-term counselling service for children and young people aged between 13 and 16 years old.

Powys Teaching Health Board

Free NHS programme helping Powys people to lose weight

Powys Teaching Health Board is encouraging people with a body mass index (BMI) of over 25 to sign up for an online weight management programme. Foodwise for Life is a nine-week programme which is part of the Welsh Government's All Wales Obesity Pathway and is led by dietetic support workers.

By focusing on the behavioural element behind people's habits, it supports people to make sustainable changes for long term health benefits without feeling deprived, which is often what leads to the all or nothing approach to weight loss. The programme runs for nine weeks but continued support is offered long after the sessions finish. Adults in Powys with a BMI over 25 can self-refer to join the Foodwise for Life programme in Powys.

The Help Us Help You campaign is shining a light on how we can lead a healthier lifestyle. By making a number of lifestyle choices such as eating well, being active and protecting our mental wellbeing, we are more likely to live longer and less likely to develop serious illnesses and health conditions.



Public Health Wales NHS Trust

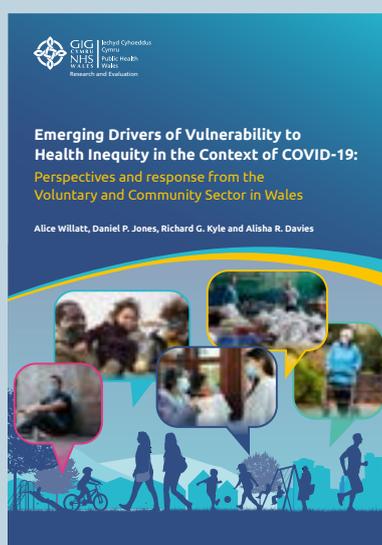
New research captures the impact of COVID-19 on vulnerability and the Voluntary and Community Sector's rapid supportive response

A new report, funded by Public Health Wales NHS Trust, highlights how vulnerability emerged in Wales during the Coronavirus pandemic, and how the voluntary and community sector (VCS) has played a critical role in tackling this challenge.

Key needs that emerged as a direct result of the pandemic included worsening mental health due to anxiety and loneliness, economic insecurity due to strained household finances and job loss, digital exclusion, and a loss of many face-to-face services. These emerging vulnerabilities were found to cluster together and were often linked to pre-existing social inequality.

The research highlights that the VCS has been pivotal in helping to tackle isolation and loneliness, address the consequences of digital exclusion, broker access to statutory services and fill in gaps in provision.

Interviewees reflected on challenges faced by the VCS, including lack of secure funding and the impacts of the pandemic on the wellbeing of the VCS workforce. Alongside some of the opportunities the pandemic had created, including the time and cost savings from digital working, the research indicated there had been increased collaboration with statutory services and greater recognition and appreciation for the VCS sector as a whole.



Swansea Bay University Health Board

App puts GPs in touch with hospital consultants within seconds

In April 2020, Swansea Bay University Health Board became the first in Wales to introduce Consultant Connect. It has helped reduce hospital admissions and outpatient referrals at a time when the NHS is under huge pressure. Consultant Connect was developed in Swansea Bay in 72 hours instead of the usual six to eight weeks.

When it was introduced, the 24-7 service was used for COVID-19 inquiries and three specialities. During that first month, the app was downloaded by 200 users with 141 calls made from 29 different surgeries across Swansea Bay. Now more than 30 specialities are available, with more expected to be added. Since April 2020, more than 4,100 calls have been made, with the average time taken to answer just 22 seconds.

Reported outcomes show only half the calls made in relation to acute care led to patients being admitted to hospital. Around a third led to patients being referred to a clinic or outpatients and the remaining fifth saw the patient treated out of hospital. For non-acute care, hospital admission was avoided in 14% of calls, and referrals to a clinic or outpatients avoided in 33% of calls. Only 8% resulted in hospital admission.



Cancer rehabilitation pathway launches

Velindre Cancer Centre, Newport Live and Newport National Exercise Referral Scheme (NERS) have worked together to launch WE CAN; a new cancer rehabilitation pathway. The pathway, which is being piloted, will help people living with cancer with advice and support to aid their wellbeing. The pathway will provide access to online resources to support physical activity and help patients to be fitter and stronger to further support recovery.

For the first six weeks of the WE CAN pathway, patients will be given support by Velindre's Specialist Physiotherapy team in areas such as physical activity, fatigue management, good nutrition and mindfulness, via online resources. Additional support will then be delivered by Newport Live and Newport NERS who will provide virtual exercise videos that patients can do at home. In addition, they will offer online consultations with fitness instructors to support their physical activity and enable people to remain active beyond the course.

The pathway is a pilot for a larger programme and is aimed to enhance the physical activity provision for adults with a cancer diagnosis across South East Wales and to increase physical activity levels of individuals in a safe and supporting environment.



Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

Gaming app to educate next generation of emergency service users

The Welsh Ambulance Service has launched a revolutionary new gaming app to help young people understand what to do in an emergency. The Trust's Blue Light Hub app boasts four games which teach users about what happens when they call 999, the appropriate use of 999, how ambulance resources are dispatched and the different uniforms they might encounter on their NHS journey.

The bilingual app is aimed predominantly at 7–12-year-olds and hosts four games which are:

- Quiz: A fun game which asks players about using 999 wisely, calling 999, uniforms, equipment and vehicles
- 999: Educates on what happens when the emergency phone system is used
- Dress Up: Familiarises users with all the different uniforms they may encounter on their NHS journey
- Dispatch: Helps users understand how resources such as ambulances are utilised

The idea was borne out of discussions with a clinical psychologist and a social development expert on how to best engage with and form positive behaviours in young people.



The Welsh NHS Confederation is the only national membership body representing all the organisations making up the NHS in Wales. We represent the seven local Health Boards, three NHS trusts, Health Education and Improvement Wales and Digital Health and Care Wales. We are part of the NHS Confederation and host NHS Wales Employers. We support our members by acting as a driving force for positive change through strong representation, facilitating system leadership and our proactive policy, influencing, communications, events and engagement work.

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