



Welsh NHS Confederation
Confederasiwn GIG Cymru

Briefing

Addressing the planned care backlog

This briefing highlights examples of work being done by NHS organisations across Wales to support efforts to address the planned care backlog and help patients to wait well.

July 2022

Introduction

The NHS continues to experience the most challenging period in its history. The pandemic severely reduced the service's productivity and it is still hindering its ability to recover at a time when the backlog for physical and mental health services grows. These significant waits for planned care are having a damaging effect on patient's lives, however NHS leaders and staff are working tirelessly to work through the backlog.

During the pandemic, NHS organisations demonstrated that they could innovate at pace, with the same creative thinking now being applied to waiting lists. It is the aim of this briefing to highlight some of the current innovations within the system that are supporting efforts to address the backlog and support patients.

NHS organisations are taking direct action to address waiting times, such as Swansea Bay University Health Board's expansion of post-operative facilities to ease pressure on critical care. Cardiff and Vale University Health Board are also working in partnership with Cardiff University to ease waiting times and improve outcomes for patients with urgent eye conditions through the NHS Wales University Eye Care Centre.

There is also recognition of the importance of 'waiting well', with Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board launching the Wellness Improvement Service, which provides non-medical intervention to improve people's health and wellbeing.

Workforce is the number one limiting factor for NHS capacity and its ability to deal with the increasing backlog, with organisations taking action to ensure a 'grow our own' approach to recruitment, such as the Health & Care Academy in Powys Teaching Health Board.

As throughout the pandemic, the NHS will always strive to improve and transform services to best suit patients' needs and meet public expectations.

Improving outcomes for patients with heart failure

- Project has reduced average waiting time for first appointment by six weeks and average waiting times for first and second outpatient appointments by 50 per cent
- 97 per cent of patients in the trial were not readmitted with a primary diagnosis of heart failure and reduction in readmissions resulted in cost savings of £260,208

Heart Failure with Reduced Ejection Fraction (HFrEF) is a chronic and debilitating condition - patients with this condition account for 60 per cent of all heart failure hospital admissions. They are a high-risk group for readmission, negatively impacting their wellbeing while having a significant financial impact on the NHS, equating to one to two per cent of its annual budget. Guidance advises that a specialist follow-up should occur within two weeks and medication optimised within six months of initial diagnosis. However, due to pressures and increasing numbers of patients presenting with HFrEF, meeting these targets was not achievable for the nurse-led team.

To address the challenges faced, the heart failure nursing team and value based health care team within the health board have developed an innovative patient pathway, focused on intelligence from patient and clinical reported outcomes. The nurse-led team implemented a new e-referral system to ensure all referrals were directed to one point of access for review by an experienced nurse. This enabled appointments to be effectively prioritised and ensured more complex and urgent cases would immediately be referred to a cardiologist.

A community hub was also established, averting the need for low-risk patients to go to the hospital to optimise medication. Patients also attended cardiac rehabilitation, benefiting from a 'one-stop service' where medication was optimised alongside community exercise classes.

Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

New Urgent Primary Care Centres help reduce pressures on GPs and emergency department

- New centres to assist with pressure in primary care and emergency department
- Centres help release GPs capacity to deal with patients with more complex or chronic medical needs

Three new Urgent Primary Care Centres (UPCC) will be located across Gwynedd and Anglesey to help reduce pressures on GPs and Ysbyty Gwynedd's emergency department. The health board has been successful in obtaining Welsh Government funding to provide the service that will replicate the UPCC already established in Wrexham and Flintshire.

The project will target on-the-day urgent primary care presentations and patients with certain medical symptoms may be given an appointment with a clinician at the UPCC. This will then help release capacity for the GPs to deal with patients with more complex or chronic medical problems. Patients who attend the emergency department will be assessed and a referral will be made to the UPCC if appropriate.

This service does not offer a drop-in clinic, patients will need to contact their GP surgery in the first instance who will then make an assessment whether they are suitable for a referral to the UPCC.



Cardiff and Vale University Health Board

Working collaboratively to improve eye care for patients across Wales

- NHS Wales University Eye Care Centre is providing training for 21 optometrists. There are plans for another 21 places to be funded by 2023
- Dedicated theatres have increased cataract activity to 427 treatments per month from 60 per month on average

As part of a plan to address waiting times and improve outcomes for patients with urgent eye conditions, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board have been leading a series of eye care reform initiatives.

This plan included the creation of the NHS Wales University Eye Care Centre in Cardiff, in partnership with Cardiff University, to provide additional training to upskill optometrists and allow them to see a wider variety of people who traditionally would have needed to be seen in hospital.

Established in just 100 days, the centre has improved access to eye care and continues to support the recovery of services to pre-pandemic levels. It is projected in 2022, in excess of 7,000 patients will see be seen in primary care, releasing capacity to ensure the more complex patients can be seen in a timely manner at the University Hospital of Wales.

In addition, two new theatres dedicated to cataract treatment have been established at University Hospital of Wales, funded by £1 million from Welsh Government.

Introduction of Wellness Improvement Service

- Wellness Improvement Service (WISE) provides non-medical intervention to improve people's health and wellbeing while on specific waiting lists
- Service designed to be scalable and replicable, delivered through highly trained wellness coaches

The WISE service forms part of the NHS Wales Planned Care Programme for Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board. It follows an evidence-based, lifestyle medicine approach where patient empowerment forms the basis of the service and supports behaviour change through person-centred techniques.

Wellness coaches and volunteers will lead groups of up to 20 referred patients through a structured programme helping to reduce any symptoms that may impact on quality of life.

Through a sustained education programme, WISE aims to enable referred patients to better understand the root cause of their current medical conditions and choose lifestyle behaviours that improve their long-term health.

The WISE Team will initially be able to support patients with the following conditions: chronic pain; irritable bowel syndrome; emotional wellbeing - stress, anxiety, PTSD; cardiology - high blood pressure; respiratory conditions.

Patients can be referred by their consultant, GP practice, health professionals, self-referral, or social connector. The service will also be increasing the opportunity to other conditions over the coming months to offer this key prevention and wellness support.



Digital Health and Care Wales

Linking patient data makes life-saving medicine available to vulnerable people

- Since December 16th 2021, 3,000 vulnerable people who tested positive for COVID-19 were treated with anti-viral antibody treatment
- Initiative leads to reduction in time between patient testing positive for COVID-19 and receiving time-sensitive, life-saving treatment

Thousands of vulnerable people in Wales who test positive for COVID-19 are being given easy access to anti-viral medication thanks to a partnership between Digital Health and Care Wales (DHCW) and Wales' National Antiviral Service (NAVS). This ground-breaking work to link data has helped to reduce the strain on Welsh hospitals and increase the accessibility of healthcare by making individuals aware of the anti-viral treatment available.

Towards the end of 2021, anti-viral treatment became available for those who had tested positive for COVID-19. As the treatment is time sensitive, DHCW was enlisted by NAVS to compile a list of people with underlying health conditions and link this with positive COVID-19 tests.

DHCW has compiled a list of over 60,000 patients with underlying health conditions. By linking this patient data with positive COVID-19 tests, NAVS has been able to rapidly provide potentially life-saving medicine to those who are particularly vulnerable to hospitalisation.

Health Education and Improvement Wales

Improving medical training in Wales

- New report to communicate doctor experience
- Report aims to be useful resource for trainees

Health Education and Improvement Wales have released the first addition of a new annual report, Improving Medical Training in Wales.

This new resource has been developed by their Medical Deanery with support from the Welsh Trainee Think Tank, to better communicate the commitment and work undertaken at HEIW to continually improve the experiences and lives of doctors training, working and living in Wales.

It is hoped that the first edition of this annual document is a useful resource for trainees to highlight the ongoing work that is done within HEIW. It also highlights how topics raised by trainees at any level and geographical location can have a sustainable impact on training throughout Wales.

Hywel Dda University Health Board

Mobile Respiratory Unit helping the NHS backlog

- Project aims to decentralise care, bringing care closer to patient
- Plans could provide major cost efficiency for NHS

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on respiratory services with NHS Wales. Diagnostic services were limited due to the aerosol generating procedure classification status and were further compounded by the increased demand for post-Covid diagnostics.

Respiratory Innovation Wales (RIW), in collaboration with Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board, Hywel Da University Health Board, and Life Sciences Hub Wales, have brought together a mobile unit to address the shortfall within community services and provide increased access to respiratory diagnostics.

This collaborative, initial six-month project, will provide a self-contained clinical unit in non-acute locations throughout the two health boards. The unit provides two clinic rooms, an open space clinical area and the relevant clinical equipment. It will cover different geographical areas at one-week intervals.

The scope of the project will cover (in a phased approach); spirometry, FeNo diagnostic testing, condition management plan reviews, clinician intervention clinics and non-invasive ventilation clinics.

Powys Teaching Health Board

Health & Care Academy - Health Care Support Worker Apprenticeships

- All participants achieved Level 2 qualification in clinical health care support
- Participants secured substantive health care support worker roles

Powys' Health & Care Academy was established in 2021 to contribute to a Wales-wide response to increase local access to education, training and development across the health and social care sector, specifically focused on the workforce in Powys.

The Academy has supported local people wishing to take the first steps into a career in health care, allowing apprentices the opportunity to gain clinical skills expertise whilst studying alongside experienced multi-disciplinary teams and health care professionals. This ensures they are trained to deliver the highest standards of care to patients.

Newly qualified health care support workers (HCSW) are being encouraged by the academy to continue with their professional development by following pathways onto higher levels of health care and having the opportunity to embark onto the flexible routes into nursing programmes.

The HCSW programme continues to grow, with the recruitment process to commence shortly for a new intake of apprentices to start in the autumn of 2022. This will support the ethos of “growing our own” to develop a highly skilled and motivated workforce across Powys.



Public Health Wales NHS Trust

Launch of Behavioural Science Unit

- Unit will support behavioural advice and messaging for the public, partners and the Welsh Government
- Builds on experience of internal behavioural science use to improve and protect public health, including optimising attendance at screening appointments

The Behavioural Science Unit for Health and Well-being, part of Public Health Wales' World Health Organization Collaborating Centre, was formally launched at an event held on May 19.

The past couple of years have sharpened the focus on how 'behaviour' can affect health and Public Health Wales is keen to consolidate and develop both specialist expertise in this field, and to build capability across the public health system to maximise the impact of advice, policy and services.

With the direct and indirect population health consequences of the pandemic, the current cost of living pressures and the climate crisis, the need for innovative and progressive behavioural insights and behaviourally informed interventions has never been more important.

The Unit is fully engaged with the emerging WHO Behavioural and Cultural Insights flagship initiative in the European Programme of Work, "United Action for Better Health in Europe". They are acting as a 'focal point' to bring learning from across the region to Wales, and have already contributed to guidance in this space, and featured as a case study in the WHO Behavioural Insights Units report.

Swansea Bay University Health Board

Expanding care after surgery to tackle waiting lists

- Expanding post-operative facilities to ease pressure on critical care and reduce risk of last-minute scheduled operation cancellations
- New service in Singleton and Neath Port Talbot will soon offer wider range of certain surgeries currently only carried out in Morriston Hospital

In the wake of the pandemic, pressure on waiting lists is higher than ever. Changes to how Swansea Bay University Health Board delivers services, and investment in staff and equipment, are aimed at bringing those waits down.

One of the key investments is focused on expanding enhanced post-operative care facilities, which offer a step up from general ward care for patients who need extra support immediately after their operation. This includes offering patients advanced pain relief, blood pressure monitoring and oxygen support in the immediate 24-48 hour post-operative period.

These facilities and services are not as intensive as high dependency or intensive care units. However, this additional layer of care will offer Swansea Bay hospitals greater flexibility over where that surgery can be carried out.

Singleton Hospital will benefit from four enhanced post-operative recovery beds, which will eventually become six, particularly for colorectal and gynaecology patients. Neath Port Talbot's plan to become the Orthopaedic Centre of Excellence will be supported by enhanced recovery unit beds being introduced in phase two, with the commissioning of three beds.

Velindre University NHS Trust

Cardiff Neuro-oncology Centre awarded Centre of Excellence status by Tessa Jowell Brain Cancer Mission

- Centre of Excellence status acknowledges transformation of services to elevate wrap-around patient care
- To be considered for award, Cardiff Neuro-oncology Centre made range of improvements over 18 months

The Cardiff Neuro-oncology Centre, comprising Velindre Cancer Centre, University Hospital of Wales and Cardiff University has been named as one of six new NHS brain tumour centres to have been awarded Tessa Jowell Centre of Excellence status.

The Cardiff Centre is one of six national centres to have been recognised for excellence in treatment, research and care. In time, it is the Mission's aspiration that every brain tumour centre in the UK becomes a Centre of Excellence.

The Cardiff Neuro-oncology Centre was recognised for its exemplar commitment to service development and improvement. The committee recognised the rigour and dedication with which the team took to developing the service following the committee recommendations and the many areas of excellence throughout the pathway. Cardiff was commended for its impressive rehabilitation pathway and the enthusiasm with which it has shared its best practices through the Tessa Jowell Academy for other centres to learn from.



Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

New telephone triage support system live for 999 calls

- System introduces digital features enabling clinicians to share patient information with GPs or other healthcare provider
- Greater functionality to be introduced to further support patients

The Welsh Ambulance Service has introduced a new telephone consultation tool to help clinicians arrange the most appropriate care for 999 callers. The Emergency Communication Nurse System (ECNS) software supports control room clinicians to determine the best course of action for patients who call 999 through its evidenced based approach.

ECNS is part of a comprehensive re-organisation of Welsh Ambulance Service control centres to help meet increasing patient demand, changing healthcare environment and resource availability. It enables patients to get the right care and allows the service to clinically care for patients closer to home, where appropriate.

But most importantly, the system is an evolving product. The team behind the implementation are pressing on to introduce even greater functionalities to support both patient and clinician, with video functionality being an exciting future addition.

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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