



Welsh NHS Confederation
Confederasiwn GIG Cymru

Briefing

Access to primary and community care

This briefing highlights examples of work being done by NHS organisations across Wales to develop primary and community care services and support integration

March 2023

Introduction

Primary and community care act as the ‘front door’ of the NHS, providing the first point of contact in the healthcare system. Their aim is to provide an easy, accessible route to healthcare, forming part of an important ecosystem which helps support early intervention, prevention and enables patients to stay well closer to home. It is a vital part of a vision for an integrated health and care service to create a healthier population.

However, like the rest of the system, primary and community care are currently experiencing a high level of demand and pressure. Since the pandemic, services are combining face-to-face and virtual consultations to respond to demand and patients’ needs.

They are implementing these strategies in the context of workforce and financial challenges, as well as increased demand from patients with more acute needs due to presenting late after many services were paused during the pandemic. Alongside developments such as the expansion of the 111 service, NHS organisations are developing new and innovative services to allow patients to access the care and support that they need closer to home. This includes a chatbot at Velindre University NHS Trust, a world first in oncology-trained AI.

Dental services have also been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and are beginning to resume a full range of treatments while facing a growing backlog. Organisations are working to alleviate these pressures in the long term, with a focus on workforce. For example, Health Education and Improvement Wales has introduced an enhanced offer for dental trainees aimed at improving rural services, while Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board has established a dental academy to address workforce shortages.

Organisations are also working to ensure that GPs can refer patients to timely diagnostic services, with Aneurin Bevan University Health Board opening a rapid diagnostic centre for patients presenting with vague symptoms.

Pressures and increased demand are being felt across the health and care system, but initiatives to support and develop primary and community care are important in creating an integrated service, which places patient wellbeing at its centre.

One-stop diagnostic service opens at the Grange University Hospital

- Service aims to decrease time between symptoms and treatment
- New clinic provides less fragmented patient experience

A new rapid diagnostic clinic has opened at the Grange University Hospital, providing a new pathway for patients who visit their GP with vague symptoms which do not fit into existing suspected cancer pathways.

These symptoms can sometimes include tiredness and weight loss amongst other symptoms that may be hard to diagnose towards a certain pathway. On referral, patients will typically attend the centre within 7-14 days and will usually have a CT scan and an appointment with a physician to discuss diagnosis and treatment on the same day.

The service was set up at the beginning of the pandemic at St Joseph's Hospital and has now been continued at the Grange. It creates an important pathway for patients, which is supported by dedicated radiologists, nurses, GPs and physicians from different specialities and provides a less fragmented experience for patients.

The hope is that the service will improve the patient experience and decrease the time between first symptoms and treatment, if needed.

Dental Academy aims to tackle north Wales' chronic shortage of NHS dentists

- Dental Academy plans to improve access and shorten waiting times
- Facility has undergone a £1.6m refurbishment

A new dental practice has opened its doors in Bangor, completing the first stage of an ambitious plan to help tackle a chronic shortage of NHS dentists across north Wales.

Located in the spacious Ty Glyder building, the Bangor Dental Academy forms part of Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board's ambitious efforts to attract, train and retain more dental professionals in response to a UK-wide shortage.

Once fully staffed, the academy's recently opened ground floor dental practice will provide eight clinics, replacing the four that were lost when dental practices in Bangor and Menai Bridge closed in recent years.

The second floor of the building boasts state-of-the-art clinical and conferencing facilities that will be used to train and upskill dental professionals. By mid-2023, community dental service clinics will be introduced on the third floor, increasing the number of patients that can be seen, as well as the quality of care provided.

The Dental Academy is part of the board's wider plans to improve access to dentistry and shorten waiting times. The health board is also commissioning additional NHS dental services across north Wales, as well as introducing innovative and flexible contractual arrangements to attract new dentists to work in the area.

Cardiff and Vale University Health Board

Britain's first SWAN clinic offers hope for patients with syndromes so rare they don't have a name

- UK's first SWAN clinic opens in the University Hospital of Wales
- Clinic aims to shorten the time patients wait for a diagnosis

The UK's first syndrome without a name clinic (SWAN) has opened at the University Hospital of Wales, Cardiff.

Commissioned by the Welsh Health Specialised Services Committee and funded by Welsh Government, the SWAN Clinic has been established by Cardiff and Vale University Health Board to improve pathways for people living with rare, undiagnosed conditions across Wales.

Although rare diseases are by their nature individually rare, collectively they are common, with 1 in 17 people being affected by a rare disease at some point in their lifetime, equating to around 175,000 people across Wales. However, some are so uncommon and difficult to diagnose they are known as a 'syndrome without a name'.

Rare diseases disproportionately affect children; 30 per cent of children with a rare disease will die before their fifth birthday. Many rare diseases affect multiple systems of the body, and families describe a 'diagnostic odyssey' of seeing many different specialists before a diagnosis is made. The SWAN clinic will offer a one-stop shop to circumvent this.

Having secured £430,000 in Welsh Government funding, the SWAN Clinic will initially run as a pilot for two years and aims to shorten the time patients wait for a diagnosis, improve medical knowledge and foster research.

Health board awarded funding by Moondance Cancer Initiative to improve cancer outcomes

- Funding aims to accelerate changes that will increase numbers of cancers diagnosed at earlier stage
- Health board awarded funding to deliver initiatives, including outpatient biopsy clinics

As part of a Moondance Cancer Initiative, which has announced more than half a million pounds for seven projects across NHS Wales, Cwm Taf Morgannwg University Health Board (UHB) has been awarded funding for a project that will train surgical nurse practitioners to deliver daily outpatient biopsy clinics. This pathway expansion will shorten the time to diagnose numerous head and neck cancer patients, while also releasing capacity for other patients awaiting diagnoses and treatment.

In addition to this pathway expansion, the health board has been awarded funding for a Lung Cancer Navigator to support the delivery of the Lung Health Check pilot. This work will assist in the operational assessment of targeted lung cancer screening in Wales and will help patients be diagnosed earlier and more efficiently. The service will be evaluated to support roll out across Wales in the future.

These projects have been selected by Moondance as part of the organisation's early detection and diagnosis funding call, which aims to accelerate the implementation of changes that will increase the number of cancers diagnosed at an earlier stage in Wales.

With this latest round of funding, there are now 26 active projects being funded by the initiative across Wales, including the introduction of transnasal endoscopy in Cardiff and Vale and Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHBs.

Digital Health and Care Wales

Choose Pharmacy boosts infection screening stewardship

- Results from Sore Throat Test and Treat (STTT) provided in minutes and avoid unnecessary use of antibiotics
- 94 per cent of patients report they would have seen a GP or emergency services if the STTT had not been available

Choose Pharmacy's Sore Throat Test and Treat service (STTT) promotes antimicrobial stewardship, using a stepwise approach of a clinical examination by a pharmacist and, for patients who meet the criteria, an on-the-spot sore throat swab service to screen against bacterial infections.

If bacteria are not detected, the sore throat is probably caused by a virus, meaning antibiotics will not help. Results from the throat swab are provided in minutes, and if a bacterial infection is present and the patient can be helped by antibiotics, they may be supplied by the pharmacist. Antibiotics are only supplied after the pharmacist discusses benefits and possible harms, including antibiotic resistance.

Results are sent digitally to the patient's GP via Choose Pharmacy, the digital infrastructure that Digital Health and Care Wales (DHCW) developed to support provision of services in community pharmacies in Wales.

At an infection research meeting in Sweden, a DHCW representative spoke on the benefits of the service. This included a long-term evaluation, with a total of 94 per cent of patients who received a STTT consultation reporting that they would have made an appointment with a GP or emergency services had the service not been available, and about one in five consultations resulting in antibiotic supply.

Health Education and Improvement Wales

New offer for dental trainees set to improve dental care in rural Wales

- New offer hopes to encourage trainees to complete training in a rural practice
- Enhanced support package includes range of benefits, including rural living grant

A new recruitment initiative aimed at encouraging future dental trainees to take up opportunities across rural Wales has been launched by Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW). Most new dental graduates choose to complete their Dental Foundation Training (DFT) in a general dental practice. However, many dental graduates prefer to complete their DFT in more urban areas, leaving some practices in rural parts of Wales under-resourced.

In 2021/22, 6 per cent of DFT vacancies were left unfilled. This meant that support packages had to be rapidly put in place for these practices, and unfortunately access to NHS care for the local population in that area reduced.

As a solution, HEIW has launched DFT WERO (Welsh Enhanced Recruitment Offer), to encourage trainees to complete their training in a rural practice and increase dental services for people in the area. The initiative offers an enhanced support package for trainees who carry out their DFT in specific rural dental practices in west, north and central Wales.

This new package includes benefits such as:

- £5,000+ rural living grant
- Weekly study day programme
- Royal college membership exam fees covered by HEIW
- £600 study budget towards exam preparation
- Access to free online learning resources
- Wellbeing support.

Hywel Dda University Health Board

Respiratory Innovation Wales bus provides LUMEN service

- Lung cancer service extended across all counties in the health board area
- LUMEN provides patients with direct access to a specialist nurse

People concerned about lung cancer symptoms can access the Lung Cancer Symptom Assessment Line (LUMEN) in the Respiratory Innovation Wales (RIW) bus which visited towns across the Hywel Dda University Health Board (UHB) area in January and February.

LUMEN is a phone line service, providing an access point for people to speak with a specialist nurse to discuss their symptoms and be referred for a chest X-ray, if needed, for further investigation.

The service was launched 15 August 2022 as a pilot in the Carmarthenshire area. Following positive patient feedback and impact, the service was extended to all counties across the health board in December 2022.

It is available to anyone registered with a GP in the health board area, who is aged 40 or over, with any of these symptoms:

- Cough (more than 3 weeks)
- Losing weight without trying
- Shortness of breath
- Hoarse voice
- Repeated chest infections
- Chest pain
- More tired than usual
- Loss of appetite
- A lung condition with changing symptoms

Powys Teaching Health Board

New digital support for people seeking help with alcohol and substance use

- Service to help individuals concerned about mild-to-moderate alcohol or drug use
- Use of digital tools help break down barriers by supporting people to access help

People affected by drugs or alcohol in Powys now have access to NHS support online through SilverCloud® digital therapy.

The new programmes, Space from Alcohol and Space from Drug Use, can help individuals who are concerned about mild-to-moderate alcohol or drug use explore their relationship with substances and make informed choices on their own terms.

It can be difficult to reach out for support with alcohol and drugs, with many people worried about taking that first step. Digital tools can help break down barriers by supporting people to access help for their concerns early, in a way that fits around their life.

The SilverCloud® service, a leading provider of clinically proven digital support based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET), is delivered by the health board on behalf of NHS Wales, in partnership with Amwell, a digital health enablement platform.

SilverCloud® therapy programmes take 12 weeks and can be accessed online, without a GP referral, from any electronic device. For best results clients are advised to engage with the programmes 3-4 times a week for 15-30 minutes each time.

Public Health Wales NHS Trust

Implementation of new Cervical Screening Information Management System

- Cervical Screening Information Management System goes live
- System is adaptable and able to interface with other NHS databases

The Cervical Screening Information Management System (CSIMS) for the cervical screening programme in Wales went live successfully on 20 September 2022.

CSIMS is the pathway management system that is now used by the cervical screening programme to manage the call/recall, issuing of results letters and failsafe of people eligible for cervical screening in Wales. It is a modern, adaptable system that can interface with other NHS databases.

CSIMS will be able to hold the records of people with a cervix who are registered with their GP as male once they (or their GP on their behalf) have made themselves known to the programme. The system will issue them a result letter following a test and invite them automatically for their next screening.

Screening, IT and information governance teams have been excellent in developing and implementing a new in-house CSIMS. Screening teams have also done tremendous work in moving the age change in the bowel screening programme.

Swansea Bay University Health Board

App connects dentists with consultants for expert advice and support

- Swansea Bay becomes the first area in the UK to use Consultant Connect in dentistry
- Only 40 per cent of queries raised through Consultant Connect have needed a referral

A phone app that puts GPs in touch with hospital consultants for expert advice is being used by dentists in Swansea Bay University Health Board (UHB).

There are currently 19 General Dental Services practices signed up to use Consultant Connect, making Swansea Bay UHB the first area in the UK to use the app within dentistry.

Staff can access advice for their patients from consultants in orthodontics or restorative dentistry. This can help decide whether patients need treatment by a consultant in a hospital setting or provide clinicians with support for treatment planning. The app allows staff to confidentially send messages, images and other personal data securely to consultants based in secondary care, who can provide support and advice on treatment options or signpost to appropriate services when necessary.

Only 40 per cent of the queries raised by clinicians through Consultant Connect have needed a referral so far, meaning patients haven't had to wait for a hospital appointment. The restorative dental department has also achieved a 43 per cent reduction in referrals for patients discussed via the app.

It is already helping to prioritise patients who may need to be seen more urgently, while decreasing the wait for those who may only require some advice. It also helps ensure patients are seen by the most appropriate clinician.

Velindre Cancer Centre launches artificial intelligence chatbot

- RITA is a world-first AI enabled virtual assistant trained specifically in oncology
- Development includes plans for pre-recorded videos with health professionals

The innovation team at Velindre Cancer Centre has launched an artificial intelligence (AI) chatbot to support patients, their loved ones and members of the public.

RITA is the world's first artificial intelligence enabled virtual assistant to be trained specifically in oncology. Over 100 clinicians, staff and patients have been involved in the development process.

Now live on the Velindre Cancer Centre website, the AI chatbot has been trained to understand and respond to a variety of frequently asked questions and direct users to useful information. RITA uses natural language processing to learn from previous interactions and provide intelligent answers.

There are several benefits to Velindre's services, including:

- Support for patients and their families 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Access and signposting to support services and resources provided by Velindre and charity partners.
- Centralised source of information, contacts, and useful media all in one place.
- Reduced strain on clinical and clerical staff's time dealing with routine queries.

Plans to develop RITA in the near future will involve pre-recorded videos with healthcare professionals. This means newly diagnosed patients can be virtually introduced to the clinicians who will provide their care ahead of their first appointment.

Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

Advanced Paramedic Practitioners

- 70 per cent fewer people needed to be taken to emergency departments when responded to by an Advanced Paramedic Practitioner (APP)
- APPs an important link between primary and secondary care

Welsh Ambulance Service data has shown that up to 70 per cent fewer people needed to be taken to emergency departments (EDs) when responded to by an Advanced Paramedic Practitioner (APP), when compared to traditional crews.

APPs provide an important link between primary and secondary care as they provide care for patients in primary care settings through a rotational working model. They are based in general practitioner surgeries, community care centres and rapid response vehicles. They have undertaken rigorous additional education to respond to 999 calls, make advanced clinical decisions, undertake medicine reviews and in some cases prescribe medication.

If there is no clinical need for a patient to be taken to an ED, the APP can provide immediate treatments, working with primary care or alternative pathways to undertake medicine reviews, social care support, mental health support and other interventions.

Following a review of their role in 2017, work is underway to build on the success of the rotational model. In several health boards, APPs are 'navigators' within the integrated urgent care centres, where they provide remote consultation to 999 callers, directing them to alternative appropriate services to avoid unnecessary hospital admissions.

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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