



Welsh NHS Confederation  
Confederasiwn GIG Cymru

Briefing

# Supporting people through cancer

This briefing highlights examples from NHS organisations across Wales of improving diagnosis, treatment and support for patients with cancer.

October 2023

# Introduction

Like many other services, cancer services remain under great pressure with continued high demand. Currently, around 20,000 people are diagnosed with cancer in Wales every year and it is estimated this number will rise to almost 25,000 by 2040 ([Cancer Research UK: Wales Overview 2023](#)).

Across Wales, the NHS is working to transform the way in which cancer services are delivered and improve waiting times. Services and staff aim to care for those affected through an innovative and empathetic approach, which involves cross-organisation and partnership working.

Prevention and early intervention are crucial in reducing the exposure to risk factors for many types of cancer, and in addressing the barriers to screening and diagnosis. Due to the importance of early intervention in the identification and treatment of cancer, Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) have launched platform GatewayC, giving primary care clinicians access to free cancer diagnosis education.

Clinical trials are crucial for advances in care and treatment, with Velindre University NHS Trust progressing the co-sponsored PATHOS trial. PATHOS is looking at the role of less intensive treatment after minimally invasive surgery for people whose cancers have tested positive for Human Papilloma Virus. NHS organisations are also developing new roles, with a focus on providing seamless and personalised care. Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board has recruited metastatic clinical nurse specialists who offer physical and emotional support.

Digital has also been an important tool in improving services. The use of the My Clinical Outcomes platform at Cardiff and Vale University Health Board aims to place the patient at the centre of treatment improvements by personalising clinical care. This approach has already been successful at avoiding hospital admissions and reducing hospital stays at the Sussex Cancer Centre.

This briefing highlights examples from NHS organisations across Wales to improve both cancer treatment and support to people affected by cancer.

# Aneurin Bevan University Health Board

## Interventional Radiology department awarded an exemplar site status

- Interventional radiology team recognised for developing new services
- The team collaborated to create a 24/7 service available to all patients

Interventional radiology (IR) is one of the most innovative and fastest-growing specialities in the field of medicine. An interventional radiology team performs image-guided procedures, which are often minimally invasive and include complex life-saving and cancer treatments.

The health board's IR team has been awarded an exemplar site status by the British Society of Interventional Radiology after being recognised for demonstrating a commitment to the development of high-quality IR Services. Receiving this prestigious accolade is a reflection of the level of service provided consistently to patients.

The team have been actively involved in research and have worked tirelessly to develop new services, such as prostate artery embolization. They have also collaborated with neighbouring health boards to develop an out of hours IR service, so that a 24/7 service is available to all patients.

The opening of The Grange University Hospital in November 2020 brought two new state-of-the-art IR suites, as well as a five-bed radiology day case unit; allowing the health board to further expand its IR services. The well-established department has also been delivering specialist services on a national level.

## Specialist nurses appointed to support patients with secondary breast and colorectal cancer

- Health board appoints first metastatic clinical nurse specialists
- New posts deliver care designed to suit complex needs of patients

Patients with incurable secondary breast and colorectal cancer are benefitting from the support of three new specialist nurses, who have been appointed as the health board's first metastatic clinical nurse specialists.

Metastatic cancer occurs when the cancer spreads to other parts of the body. Whilst treatment options are available to help control the cancer, improve quality of life and help people live longer, there is sadly no cure.

Patients living with metastatic cancer require specialist support to address their complex needs and the uncertainty they face about the future and these roles help to ensure they receive the best possible treatment and care. The nurses are on hand to support patients through the complex physical and emotional effects of the disease, coordinate treatment and care, signpost to support services and act as a direct point of contact for questions or concerns.

These nursing posts help deliver true personalised care for patients and will have a positive impact on people affected by cancer in the region.

# Cardiff and Vale University Health Board

## Digital PROMS – Better patient insights, part of the approach to Value Based Healthcare

- Digital approach could help patients avoid hospital stays
- The My Clinical Outcomes platform helps to enhance individualised clinical care

The health board has embarked on an ambitious programme to introduce the collection of Electronic Patient Reported Outcome Measures (PROMS), working with My Clinical Outcomes (MCO).

The MCO platform automates the collection and analysis of PROMs, survey-like health assessments completed by patients that are used to evaluate their conditions and evaluate their healthcare experiences.

This programme, grounded in a value-based healthcare approach, provides greater insight into how improvements to treatments can be informed by patients and will help transform the collection of patient data via a digital platform.

The approach has already proven to be a success for individual specialties across the NHS, including the Sussex Cancer Centre at the Royal Sussex County Hospital, where patients with treatable but not curable cancers became less likely to be admitted to hospital and have shorter hospital stays when using the MCO platform. The My Clinical Outcomes platform has already been implemented in several health board specialties, including the South Wales Neuroendocrine Tumour (NET) service.

Digitising the process through the MCO platform is enhancing individualised clinical care and guiding the timing of patient follow-ups in line with individual needs. The new platform will make the service increasingly efficient by enabling the service to optimise prioritising patients and allocating outpatient appointment slots, easing the burden on medical and nursing resource.

## Advanced practice role helps improve cancer pathways and waiting times for radiology patients

- A new role has helped scan almost 400 more patients in eight months
- The role has saved twelve and a half hours of radiology staff time per week

A new advanced practice radiography cancer navigator role in Cwm Taf Morgannwg UHB has reduced waiting times and improved cancer pathways for radiology patients, scanning almost 400 more patients in the eight months since it began. Twelve and a half hours of radiology staff time per week has also been saved as a result of the navigator role being implemented.

The role was introduced in August 2022 at the Princess of Wales Hospital, thanks to funding from the Bevan Commission's Planned Care Innovation Programme. The Radiology Pathway Navigation project aimed to significantly reduce delays between diagnosis and treatment for cancer patients, leading to better outcomes and higher rates of survival.

The navigator acts as a guide for patients by explaining radiology examinations and procedures, as well as combining several tests into one visit to the radiology department. The navigator acts as a crucial link between radiology and clinical teams and attends multidisciplinary team meetings to escalate patients through the pathway and assist with onward referrals.

Initial steps involved changing the referral and authorisation process, which allowed for a quick reduction from five days to one day for urgent suspected cancer referrals. The project concentrated on lung and bowel cancers with significant improvements made, including a reduced waiting time for CT staging scans, following a positive chest X-ray or positive colonoscopy.

# Digital Health and Care Wales

## Velindre University NHS Trust joins WelshPAS

- New system has received positive early feedback
- System's implementation forms part of Digital Health and Care Wales' (DHCW) Cancer Programme

The much-anticipated implementation of DHCW's WelshPAS in Velindre Cancer Centre (VCC) has successfully gone live.

WelshPAS holds patient identification details, and records details of patients' hospital visits, including waiting list management, medical records, inpatient treatment, outpatient appointments and emergency visits. The implementation of WelshPAS in VCC forms part of DHCW's wider Cancer Programme, established to implement a Cancer Informatics Solution for Wales to replace the current Cancer Network Information System Cymru (Canisc).

Moving VCC onto the national architecture and aligning one of their key operational systems with the rest of Wales brings significant benefits, including:

- All-Wales view of a patient's journey and facilitates more collaborative ways of working across health boards/trusts
- Consistent administration process across most of NHS Wales
- Modernisation through continuous enhancement of the system to meet user and organisational needs
- The ability for VCC to better integrate with other systems/ applications

This achievement was the direct result of the commitment, determination and effort from all involved, as well as collaboration and team working across the two organisations. Early feedback has been very positive with users praising the improved access to clinical information that the new system provides.

# Health Education and Improvement Wales

## 2,000+ clinicians to get free cancer education

- GatewayC platform aims to support the early detection of cancer
- Platform offers free CPD across a range of cancer sites

Primary care clinicians employed in general practice across Wales are set to benefit from GatewayC's free early cancer diagnosis education.

Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) have worked in partnership with the Wales Cancer Network and the Christie NHS Foundation Trust to launch GatewayC in Wales, following a successful launch in England. This rollout supports the Cancer Improvement Plan for Wales 2023 – 2026, which sets out the ambition to identify cancer earlier and faster to improve patient outcomes.

This early cancer diagnosis resource will be delivered through the online GatewayC platform with the aim of supporting clinical decision-making, early detection of cancer, and improved management, care and support for people affected by cancer.

Designed by the NHS, GatewayC offers free CPD across multiple cancer sites in the form of courses, webinars, and documentary style videos. All education is free to enrol and offers the flexibility to complete bite-sized activities. The personalised learning dashboard saves the user's progress, allowing them to return to courses as many times as needed.



# Hywel Dda University Health Board

## New cancer clinic aims to improve patient care

- New service allows patients with a secondary cancer diagnosis to undergo further investigations
- Health board will offer appointments within two weeks of GP referral

A new service has been launched in Hywel Dda University Health Board for those who have had a probable cancer diagnosed but it is unclear exactly what kind of cancer it is, and where the cancer started.

The Malignancy of Unknown Origin (MUO) service will allow patients with a secondary cancer diagnosis to undergo further investigations to try and determine the source of the cancer and receive the most appropriate treatment and care.

Working closely with colleagues at Swansea Bay University Health Board, Hywel Dda UHB will offer patients appointments within two weeks of referral from their GP and contact from the MUO team within 48 hours to a patient that is already in hospital.

Based in the Pembrokeshire Haematology and Oncology Day Unit at Withybush Hospital, patients will be assessed and reviewed by a doctor and have an oncology clinical nurse specialist assigned as their key worker to help co-ordinate their care and support them through their journey.

# Powys Teaching Health Board

## Multi-million pound investment to improve access to cancer services in south Powys

- £48 million being invested in state-of-the-art radiotherapy equipment
- Investment will provide new and improved treatment for cancer patients

Powys Teaching Health Board has welcomed a multi-million pound investment which will improve access to cancer services in south Powys. Eluned Morgan announced more than £86 million for new cancer treatment facilities, equipment, and software.

The investment is part of a long-term programme in southeast Wales to transform how cancer services are delivered. It marks a major milestone in transforming cancer treatment across the region and brings care closer to patients' homes.

More than £48 million is being invested in state-of-the-art radiotherapy equipment, replacing the linear accelerator fleet located at Velindre Cancer Centre. Eight of these machines will be replaced at the centre in Whitchurch and two more will be housed at a brand-new radiotherapy centre at Nevill Hall Hospital in Abergavenny between now and 2025.

This will ensure radiotherapy services have reliable equipment, can provide the latest techniques, and have two additional machines to meet the growing demand for cancer treatment. The new £38 million Radiotherapy 'Satellite' Centre at Nevill Hall Hospital in Abergavenny will be open by 2024 to improve access to radiotherapy for people living in the north and east of the catchment area of Velindre Cancer Centre.

## Scoping report identifies potential barriers and facilitators to prehabilitation interventions

- Report identifies intervention setting as barrier to accessing rehabilitation, depending on cancer type
- Review aimed to establish existing evidence on maximising prehabilitation interventions

An agile scoping review has aimed to establish existing evidence around maximising prehabilitation interventions. Prehabilitation refers to interventions carried out before surgery, which aim to reduce post-surgery complications and facilitate recovery. The evidence consistently indicated four different components: time, access, setting, and health.

Being able to find the time within daily commitments and ongoing treatment appointments was a barrier to participation and the evidence also identified that locally accessible interventions acted as a facilitator. The cost of transport, the burden of appointments and limited pre-operative time acted as barriers.

The setting of an intervention was an important factor in influencing people to attend, but evidence was mixed as to whether a hospital setting was the most effective place to hold the intervention. The evidence indicated this depended on the different types of cancer that patients were living with. Those with gynaecological cancers were motivated more in non-hospital settings, while those who were preparing for major abdominal cancer surgery reported that hospital-based interventions had greater compliance levels.

The current health of the patient was also a motivating factor in terms of perceived health and wellbeing benefits of the intervention. Conversely, feeling too unwell, experiencing side effects of their current treatment, and feeling fatigued often acted as barrier to people's participation in interventions.

## Swansea cancer centre first in Wales to take part in proton beam therapy trial

- Swansea is first Welsh centre selected for UK PARABLE trial
- First UK trial of its kind, enrolling 192 patients across 22 sites

Swansea is the first Welsh centre selected for a UK trial looking at the potential benefits of proton beam therapy (PBT) for certain patients with breast cancer. This will test the benefits of proton beam therapy compared with standard radiotherapy for patients with breast cancer who are at greater risk of long-term heart problems after radiotherapy treatment.

PBT uses charged particles instead of X-rays to target tumours more precisely. The hope is it will allow doctors to deliver the dose exactly where it is needed, minimising the risk of radiation damage to the heart without increasing the risk of early side effects. However, PBT is expensive and only available in certain locations across the UK. This is why researchers emphasise the importance of evaluating any potential benefits within a trial.

PARABLE, the first UK trial of its kind, will enrol 192 patients across 22 sites. They will be put into one of two groups, selected at random, with one group receiving PBT and the other going to their local centre for standard X-ray radiotherapy. The Swansea centre aims to enrol up to six patients. They will not know which form of therapy they will receive until after they consent. The team are proud to have recruited their first participants within a month of opening and look forward to supporting others in future.

## Joint head and neck cancer trial passes incredible 1,000 patient recruitment milestone

- Trial will look at role of less intensive treatment for people whose cancers have tested positive for Human Papilloma Virus
- Aims to reduce permanent side effects of treatment which can have a major impact on quality of life

PATHOS, a Velindre University NHS Trust and Cardiff University co-sponsored clinical trial, is a Phase III, international trial aiming to develop a kinder treatment for patients with head and neck cancer. It is looking at the role of less intensive treatment after minimally invasive surgery for people whose cancers have tested positive for Human Papilloma Virus (HPV). The 1,000th patient was recruited in the last week of August 2023 at the Liverpool Head and Neck Centre.

HPV-associated head and neck cancer, typically involving the tonsils and tongue base, have become increasingly common over the last two decades. Patients are often cured of their disease but live with the side-effects of treatment, particularly swallowing problems, which can be permanent and have a major impact on quality of life.

PATHOS is aiming to find out whether this group of patients could have less intensive treatment and, as a result, experience fewer side-effects. Results of the study are expected to be reported by 2027.

# Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust

## **New control room technology helps the trust better respond to 999 calls**

- New system supports better communication between control room and front line, improving responses for all patients including those with cancer
- The Welsh Ambulance Service was the first major UK ambulance trust to adopt this new technology

The Welsh Ambulance Service has introduced new technology to improve the way it responds to 999 calls. LifeX is a telephony and communications system that helps control room dispatchers to better communicate with frontline crews and process information in a more streamlined way.

The new system is designed to manage resources more effectively and was delivered in collaboration with partners Frequentis and Ambulance Radio Programme over a three-day period.

It gives control room staff access to cutting-edge communication technology which will significantly benefit the life-saving work they do, including managing and directing resources to the scenes of emergency situations. The collaboration of teams was instrumental in the successful delivery of this project and made the Welsh Ambulance Service the first major UK ambulance trust to adopt this new technology.

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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