Challenges facing the NHS in Wales: A briefing for AMs

This briefing sets out the key challenges for health and care services in Wales, the progress required to convert words into action and the steps most urgently needed over the course of this Assembly.

The Welsh NHS Confederation is the only national membership body which represents all the organisations making up the NHS in Wales: the seven Local Health Boards and three NHS Trusts. Our role is to support our members to improve health and well-being by working with them to deliver high standards of care for patients and best value for taxpayers’ money. We act as a driving force for positive change through strong representation and our policy, influencing and engagement work.

Key points

The next five years represent a critical period of transformation in health and care services in Wales. Changes in how people live their lives and the success of the NHS in keeping people alive for longer means demand for care is rapidly rising. The needs of people now are very different from patients in 1948. Thousands of people now have a long-term relationship with an NHS that supports them to live with ongoing health conditions – a trend which is predicted to grow rapidly in coming years.

To meet these challenges the NHS needs to modernise and adapt the way it approaches care and treatment. For the sustainability of the NHS to be secured, it cannot do things in the same way. Some changes may be controversial. Many services will need to be redesigned to deliver radically different models of care which better fit the needs of people and reflect advances in technology and medical treatment. We also need to identify innovative ways to overcome historic boundaries between organisations which hamper seamless care for patients.

Recognising the need for action, the Welsh NHS Confederation is calling on the Welsh Government to develop a long term vision and ten year strategy to ensure a sustainable health and care service in Wales. The establishment of a new Government in Wales presents a significant opportunity to set out a vision for improving health and care in Wales. The development of an explicit vision and strategy would help NHS organisations to develop and implement new service delivery models and transformational change with greater pace and scale.
The challenges facing health and care

1. **The need challenge:** Meeting the rising demand for care, particularly from people with complex needs or long-term conditions, is a major challenge. Redesigning the healthcare system to reflect the needs of people now – and so that it remains sustainable in the future. This includes shifting more care closer to people’s homes, while maintaining hospital care.

2. **The workforce challenge:** Planning for a sustainable and resilient workforce to better match changing demand. Developing staff roles and skills to provide complex, multi-disciplinary, co-ordinated care, in partnership with individuals, other sectors and communities.

3. **The financial challenge:** Recognising the financial pressures on all parts of the system and getting value from every penny of public money spent on healthcare. Being open and honest in the debate on the future levels and sources of funding for healthcare.

4. **The integration challenge:** Focusing on partnership and collaborative working across all public bodies so care revolves around the needs and capacities of individuals, families and communities.

5. **The public health challenge:** Investing in prevention and early intervention to support and maintain people’s well-being and prevent ill health for as long as possible. Empowering and informing people to take responsibility for their own health and well-being.

What does the future health and care system look like?

We believe a health and care system fit for the future should:

- Invest in prevention and early intervention to support and maintain health, well-being and independence in communities;
- Provide person-centred care that is integrated, compassionate and joined-up across sectors;
- Empower and inform people to take responsibility for their health and shape their own care around their individual needs, ensuring they are involved in decision-making;
- Listen to and learn from the experiences of patients, their carers and staff and be accountable to the public;
- Continually improve quality and safety, engage and equip staff to work in new ways and embrace innovation and technology to achieve this;
- Reduce inequalities in outcomes, eliminate discrimination and value mental and physical health equally; and
- Use finite resources responsibly, efficiently and fairly, making tough choices which ensure sustainable services.
What does the NHS need from the Government?

While progress has been made by the former Government there is much more headway to be made. Recognising the need for action, the Welsh NHS Confederation is calling on the Welsh Government to develop a long term vision and ten year strategy for sustainable health and care services in Wales. The call for a vision has been endorsed by nearly 40 organisations in the Welsh NHS Confederation’s 2016 Policy Forum document “Ten actions required to improve health, social care and well-being in Wales”, produced for the National Assembly for Wales election.

There is now an opportunity for the Welsh Government through the planned Parliamentary Review into health and social care in Wales, to take forward the following key priorities which have been identified by NHS Wales leaders:

- To develop a long term vision and ten year strategy for sustainable health and care services in Wales;
- To develop a deliverable workforce and organisational development plan to support the long term strategy;
- To make best use of the physical, financial, workforce and technological resources available;
- To co-design, commission and provide joined up health services and to work with partners to provide patients with an integrated health and care experience;
- To work with public sector partners to invest time and resources in services that promote health, well-being and personal responsibility;
- To drive consistently high quality services and outcomes and develop a performance management framework that supports this; and
- To provide clear and consistent leadership and take strategic decisions on national priorities and programmes.

Priorities for NHS Wales

1. A vision for health and care system: The planned Parliamentary Review is an opportunity to build political consensus around the long term challenges facing the health and care system. The demographic trajectory over the next 20 years is stark and the Parliamentary Review needs the type of long term focus envisaged in the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2014 to meet the future needs of the Welsh population.

2. Workforce: The health service is Wales’ biggest employer, currently employing around 86,500 staff and providing a significant contribution to both the national and local economy. It’s important that Government policies support the ability of local NHS organisations to deploy staff in the best way to support high-quality and efficient patient care. The Government, through cross-party support, must help facilitate sustainable long-term workforce planning according to the needs of local communities.

3. Finance: The rise in demand, coupled with constrained financial resources, has made delivering health and care services in the current model increasingly difficult. The NHS is committed to working more efficiently in order to rise to the challenges that it faces. However, it has become increasingly clear that traditional methods of savings are unlikely to deliver what is needed in the future. It is important that we are realistic about the current and future costs of health and care services and we need to work with all stakeholders to understand the future resources required to secure the system.

4. Integration: The health and well-being of the population is not the sole responsibility of the NHS - everyone must come together to play their part. The NHS will not be able to rise to the challenges it faces without the help of our colleagues in other sectors, including housing, education and, in particular, those in social services. The forthcoming Public Service Boards, introduced as part of the Well-being of Future Generations Act 2014, will enable public services to commission and plan collaboratively, ensuring that services are integrated and that care and support provided improves health and well-being outcomes for the local population.

5. Public health and prevention: Wales faces a significant number of public health challenges, including high levels of obesity, drinking above the guidelines, smoking and poor levels of physical activity. The impact of such behaviours on our health is resulting in significant demand being placed on the health service. Bold decisions are now required to make industrial scale change in our services and shift the funding to support people to make better lifestyle choices. The NHS will continue to work across Government and public sector partners to invest time and resources in services that promote health, well-being and personal responsibility and shift resources towards community based interventions.

6. Quality: Delivering high quality, safe and prudent healthcare to optimise outcomes for patients is at the heart of our shared priorities. This was recognised in the recent OECD report “Reviews of Health Care Quality: United Kingdom 2016”. We will continue to focus on driving consistently high standards across NHS Wales to improve patient experience and outcomes and to identify further efficiency opportunities.

7. Leadership: We need strong leaders to find solutions to the challenges that we face. Leadership across the NHS, Welsh Government and our partners is required to achieve the whole system changes required to meet the difficult challenges that we face.
Key areas where you can support the NHS

There is a need for an open and honest conversation with the public about what the NHS can provide in the future. While the NHS is free at the point of contact, it is not free of obligation, and the public will need to be supported in taking more responsibility for their own health. Patients need to become partners in managing and improving their health, rather than passive recipients of healthcare.

Over the course of this Assembly we want AMs to be frank with the public about the scale of the challenges and the extent of the changes required. This should be reflected by holding constructive debates in the Assembly that focus on people’s outcomes, experiences and well-being. It is also critical that the areas mentioned above remain high on the political agenda across Assembly Committees, questions during Plenary and in relevant Cross-Party Groups.

There will be many local areas where debates will be happening about the future of local services. It’s right that AMs play a key role in these discussions. We encourage AMs to engage with both our members and patients in their respective constituencies on the tough choices needed if we are to sustain our vision of a world-class health and care system in Wales.

What will the NHS do in return?

This is not just down to politicians. Leaders at all levels of health and care, and in all local areas, need to build on progress made so far and drive the changes required. All leaders across the NHS will continue to drive improvements and transformation within their own organisations. They will do so working in partnership with people who use the NHS and social care and the public; with their staff; and as peers in local systems with each other. In return for political support, health and care leaders will need to:

- Look beyond the boundaries of their own organisations and work in new and innovative partnerships with other sectors, such as housing, in their local area and to improve people’s care;
- Support patients, carers and citizens to get involved with and shape health and care decisions;
- Engage health and social care professions, harnessing their ideas to improve care; and
- Support health and social care professionals to take on leadership roles.

How can the Welsh NHS Confederation help you?

Please get in touch if you want further details on any of the issues raised in this briefing or would like to discuss the challenges facing the NHS. We can also provide information and briefings ahead of Assembly debates on the key issues affecting the NHS.

For more information, please contact Nesta Lloyd–Jones, Policy and Public Affairs Manager: Nesta.Lloyd-Jones@welshconfed.org

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