Introduction

As part of the Welsh NHS Confederation’s *From Rhetoric to Reality* series, this briefing, produced with NHS Wales Employers and Workforce Education Development Services (WEDS), looks at the key issues facing the NHS Wales workforce.

As changes in demographics and our lifestyles have resulted in a dramatic rise in demand on the health service, it has become increasingly clear that a transformation in the way treatment is delivered is required if the NHS is to meet the needs of a future population.

A sea-change in the way services are designed is vital. A key aspect to driving this, and successfully putting NHS Wales on a sustainable footing, is the workforce.

With an ageing population and a rising number of people with complex and chronic conditions, the workforce must be ready to evolve and respond to the challenges ahead.

As well as meeting the future needs of the population, the workforce must also develop new ways of working to address concerns about an expected shortfall in the future NHS workforce, especially for certain types of jobs and in different regions of Wales.
Workforce and healthcare trends

Currently around 129,000 workers are employed in the health sector in Wales – the equivalent of 8% of the country’s employment – while NHS Wales itself employs around 73,000 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) staff. The NHS pay bill for this stands at around £3 billion and amounts to more than 50% of total NHS spend.¹

In developing the workforce for the future, consideration needs to be given to a number of factors, including the inflow and outflow of workers in Wales.

There is also a continued demand for skilled healthcare professionals.

Meanwhile, developing strategies to address the changing demographics of the workforce will play an increasing role, with more than 45% of current workers aged 45 or over.

These circumstances, coupled with the fact that around 80% of NHS Wales’ staff who will be in NHS employment in 10 years’ time are currently working for the health service, makes the development of the workforce to meet future needs even more critical.

At present, the NHS Wales workforce is designed to deliver services to historic models and patterns of care. In the past, care has been modelled around treatment of single conditions but, with our ageing population, people now have a number of serious and complex conditions which often require long-term care from both health and social services.

The healthcare system needs to be redesigned around the individual – treating their needs but also helping them to self-manage their conditions. The system must support them to maintain their independence and to stay as healthy as possible with the aid of services in the community.

As the Welsh NHS Confederation’s discussion paper ‘From Rhetoric to Reality – NHS Wales in ten years’ time’ stated: “Delivering more of the same through traditional roles and ways of delivering care will not be an option. NHS Wales and its staff will simply have to work differently to meet increasing demands, and to be responsive to needs at the same time as ensuring high quality, compassionate, effective care.”

This significant shift in care and treatment will only be successful with the participation of the entire workforce.

As we move ahead, the skill set of the current workforce must be made best use of and built upon. There must be a greater focus on actual skills and what people can do rather than what their job title describes them as.

The key areas for the NHS Wales workforce

With the financial challenge facing the health service, all NHS organisations need to ensure workforce productivity is maximised, with a focus on:

- Efficiencies in bank, agency, locum use;
- Skill mix changes;
- Reductions in staff numbers;
- Costs from staff leaving;
- Retention and career planning; and
- Reducing sickness.

When it comes to commissioning education, planning has tended to focus on the numbers of regulated professions, rather than on the needs of patients and the skills and competencies required to support independence. This shift will need to happen and will underpin how NHS Wales plans its workforce.

A workforce fit for the future must be aligned with the direction of change for services, including the implementation of prudent healthcare that is starting to take place in Wales.

Staff must also be prepared to alter their usual patterns of working to address the variation in the quality of care on different days of the week.

Meanwhile, much greater priority needs to be given to developing the skills and competencies of the current workforce to better meet the needs of patients now and in the future. Currently less than 5% of the training and education budget is allocated to continuing professional development, while the rest is spent on securing professional qualifications.

Bringing different skills together also provides an opportunity to reduce the strain on services. To make sure services are sustainable in the future, the NHS will collaborate and support partners in other sectors, including social services, housing, education, transport and the third sector.

Consideration must be given to what services are delivered and where, when services are delivered, to what quality standard and who delivers those services.
The drivers for NHS workforce planning

In a report produced by the Centre for Workforce Intelligence, four drivers for NHS workforce planning were identified. These were:

1) Demographic and social factors

Wales has the highest proportion of people aged over 85 in the UK, while six out of ten people living longer will have at least one long-term condition. The number of young people aged 16-24 is projected to decrease by 3% by 2037, while the number aged over 65 is expected to increase by 50% by the same year.

Much planning will be required to meet the needs of an ageing population with an ageing workforce. Maintaining the health and well-being of older staff will be a key issue in developing future workforce strategy. Employers will need to understand the implications of working longer and what support employees may need.

Alongside this, services need to attract, and understand the needs of, younger workers. Patients and the workforce will have to work together and this means the skills and knowledge to do this must be built into training and education.

Managing the changing demand will require an increased focus on maximising the way the workforce is used, including skill and grade mix. Managing public expectations about the care available and the related workforce skills will also be vital.

2) Health and social care design

Better integration between health, social care and other support organisations needs to focus on where care is delivered, the design of jobs and the skills required. The need to plan across sectors is vital if this is to be a success. The focus of the system must shift towards prevention and well-being. This is something that needs to be translated into training and development plans for both the new and existing workforce.

3) Quality and productivity

Delivering person-centred care within financial constraints must be supported. Patient safety and maintaining quality of service is of paramount importance with the role of the workforce critical in achieving high-quality personalised care. Effective measures for quality of care and productivity need to be developed so that high-quality data is collected. Qualitative information needs to be captured which aligns with service change, including seven day working, nursing numbers and a continued focus on safe staffing levels and nursing acuity tools.

Changes that come with innovation and technology must also be considered. The implications for skills, knowledge, ways of working and role substitution are significant in this respect.

4) Financial and economic

Planning future service delivery is taking place during uncertainty about future levels of funding and how this will affect demand for and supply of care services. For NHS Wales the issue of the affordability and sustainability of the current workforce is critical. The extent to which the gap can continue to be closed by pay restraint needs to be realistic. The ongoing work on pay and terms and conditions, including the consultant contract and changes to Agenda for Change, is important but needs to be viewed in the context of the constraints on the ability to reduce and change workforce size and configuration without major service change.

Conclusion

Workforce redesign is essential to securing future services which will meet patient needs and support the changing face of healthcare. It must address short and medium term risks and priorities while looking to the longer term.

To be a success, planning for the future workforce must address the need to deliver care closer to patients’ homes. Skills must be developed to support this in primary and community care and to make use of technologies that will aid this process.

Roles should be built around clinical teams and workforce planning, and workforce redesign skills must be developed. Clear strategies are needed for training and development of the core workforce.

If the workforce is to meet the challenges ahead, it must become more flexible in the skills and competencies that will allow care to be delivered in a variety of settings. The requirements of the support workforce across both health and social care must also be addressed.

We know that the health service needs to be re-designed to provide the best quality care in the future, but to achieve this we must also make changes to the workforce in order for this to be realised.

For a more in-depth analysis of the key issues facing the NHS Wales workforce please visit our website and download the full report ‘From Rhetoric to Reality – NHS Workforce’ and the WEDS report ‘NHS Workforce Key Themes & Trends’ www.weds.wales.nhs.uk/resources-workforce-planning
NHS Wales Employers

NHS Wales Employers supports the strategic workforce agenda of the NHS in Wales from an NHS employers’ perspective. We recognise the central role of the workforce in facilitating service change and consequently ensure that the NHS is a place where people want to work and is an employer of choice. We support the employers with workforce policy development, practical advice and information, and enable the NHS Wales Workforce and Organisational Development community to network, and share knowledge and best practice.

NHS Wales Employers is hosted by and operates as a part of the Welsh NHS Confederation. To find out more about our work visit www.welshconfed.org

Workforce, Education and Development Services (WEDS)

Working on behalf of NHS Wales, the Welsh Government and education providers, WEDS supports the service in the development of a workforce with the skills and competencies to meet the demands of modern day healthcare. The role of WEDS is critical to NHS Wales in the delivery of its key strategic objectives and in the planning of the future workforce requirements both in terms of numbers and skills. WEDS also undertakes a number of strategic pieces of work on behalf of WG and the service. To find out more about or work visit www.weds.wales.nhs.uk

The Welsh NHS Confederation

The Welsh NHS Confederation is a membership body representing all the organisations making up the NHS in Wales: seven Local Health Boards and three NHS Trusts.

We 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. To find out more about our work please contact info@welshconfed.org or visit www.welshconfed.org

References

1 Workforce Education Development Services, August 2014. NHS Wales Workforce, Key Themes and Trends.
2 Centre for Workforce Intelligence, February 2013. Big picture challenges for health and social care Implications for workforce planning, education, training and development.