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Mr David Pojur
Assistant Coroner for North Wales (East and Central)
Coroner's Office
County Hall
Wynnstay Road
Ruthin
Denbighshire
LL15 1YN

5 February 2024

Dear Mr Pojur

Re: Regulation 28 Prevention of Future Deaths report - Vivienne Greener (deceased)

I am writing in response to a Regulation 28 Report to Prevent Future Deaths (the report) which I received on 18 December 2023, following the conclusion of the inquest into the death of Ms Vivienne Greener which occurred on 20 March 2018.

I would like to offer my sincere condolences to Ms Greener's family on their sad loss.

In the report you ask for details of action taken or proposed by the Welsh Government and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board to improve delivery of services to aid prevention of future deaths.

My response will largely focus upon the ninth matter of concern in the report, regarding the timeliness of ambulance patient handover, and the health board will reply on matters of concerns 1 – 8. My officials have worked with the health board to ensure that our responses are co-ordinated and consistent. It is important to ensure lines of accountability are clear given that responsibility for delivery of services falls with the health board. The role of the Welsh Ministers is to set the strategic direction for health boards and NHS trusts and to hold them to account for delivery of policy.

You will be aware that the urgent and emergency care system in Wales, as with other parts of the UK, has been under often unrelenting pressure for many years. This is due to the challenge presented by an ageing population, increasing prevalence of people with multiple chronic conditions and difficulties in supporting timely discharge of patients to local communities caused by social care capacity issues.

Bae Caerdydd • Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd • Cardiff
CF99 1SN

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

Patient flow is a key contributing factor to long ambulance patient handover delays. When flow is challenged bed occupancy levels increase. This often results in patients waiting long periods for admission to hospital from emergency departments and, consequently, limits available space for patients arriving by ambulance in the emergency department itself. This can cause long ambulance patient handover delays, impacting negatively on patient experience and crucially limiting available ambulance capacity to respond to other patients in the community.

These issues are all connected and require long term strategic change. The overarching Welsh Government strategy towards enabling management of these issues is set out in A Healthier Wales.

To provide clarity on priorities aligned to A Healthier Wales, I communicate my expectations of health boards and NHS trusts through an annual NHS planning framework. Organisations are expected to produce integrated medium-term plans annually, that respond to the priorities set in the NHS planning framework. The planning framework clearly sets out my expectation that health boards prioritise plans to improve timeliness of ambulance patient handovers to free up ambulance clinicians to respond to patients in the community. Given the relationship between both timely patient discharge and ambulance patient handover, I have also set a priority for improvement in patient flow.

To enable health boards and partners to deliver against these priorities, I established a national urgent and emergency care improvement programme in April 2022 and, in support, have made £50m in additional funding available over the past two years. I directed each health board to develop a local programme plan that incorporated actions to improve ambulance patient handover performance and patient flow, among other local priorities. Progress has been made across a number of indicators in recent months to help reduce pressure on emergency care services and to release capacity for patients who need an immediate response:

- Urgent Primary Care Centres in north Wales are treating around 2,300 people a month, reducing pressure on GP in-hours services and emergency departments;
- We have funded extensions in capacity for same day emergency care services which are treating and discharging hundreds of patients per month across the three district general hospitals in north Wales, freeing up precious bed capacity;
- The NHS 111 Wales telephone service has been rolled out nationally and now receives 70,000 calls a month helping to limit avoidable attendances at emergency departments;
- The '111 press 2' service is now available in every health board area in Wales, providing urgent mental health support to people of all ages 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Over 38,000 callers have accessed the pathway, with 56.4% receiving self-care advice / no further action needed. 99.1% of people who call in distress report lower levels of distress following the call. Over 6,000 calls have been received in the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board area which have been answered and provided with appropriate triage;
- We have targeted investment in 999 ambulance clinical triage resources and technology. This includes the use of video consultation technology. Around 4,500 (10-15%) patients across Wales per month are now managed without needing transport to an emergency department;
- Welsh Government provided £3m to the Welsh Ambulance Service in 2022 to recruit 100 new staff, and also provided funding for a pilot delivered by St John Ambulance which is supporting around 50% of people referred to the service to safely avoid transport to hospital; and

- An additional 21 full time equivalent (FTE) Welsh ambulance staff have been added in the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board area since December 2021, an uplift of 4.7%.

In addition, I directed the Chief Ambulance Services Commissioner to monitor delivery of plans intended to secure improvements through Emergency Ambulance Services Committee governance mechanisms. The Committee, made up of the seven chief executives of health boards, agreed to work towards eradicating all handover delays over four hours in length by the end of 2024/2025.

In terms of progress, we have generally observed improvements in ambulance patient handover although I remain extremely concerned about timeliness of handover in general and particularly at Ysbyty Glan Clwyd and Wrexham Maelor Hospital.

In view of my concern, all health board chief executives were directed to prioritise three actions for delivery over the winter months as part of a new NHS Wales ambulance patient handover improvement plan implemented from the festive period 2023/2024. As part of their local plan, the Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board priority actions include:

- Maximising the use of same day emergency care pathway across all acute sites to reduce pressure on emergency departments.
- A focus on reducing delayed discharges into the community through the Pathways of Care Delays project, to release hospital capacity earlier and support improved patient flow.
- Implementation of a continuous flow model at Wrexham Maelor to support improved patient flow through the site, enable timelier handover of patients from ambulance vehicles and release crews to respond to other patients in the community.

Although the winter period and the associated difficulties has been and will be challenging for NHS organisations, I expect to see improvement and will be monitoring the situation very closely over the coming weeks and months.

Turning to strategic plans to support improvement in quality of care in emergency departments. I continue to support improvements in emergency departments through a range of measures and this year will publish a Quality Statement for care within the emergency departments, setting out my expectations for the service. To deliver this, we are bringing the voices of our clinical leaders together through the newly established Strategic Network for Critical Care, Trauma and Emergency Medicine and focusing on what matters most to people who use the service. I made over £500,000 of additional funding available to Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board in December 2023 to support upgrades and improvements in their emergency departments which will enhance both patient and staff experiences in waiting rooms.

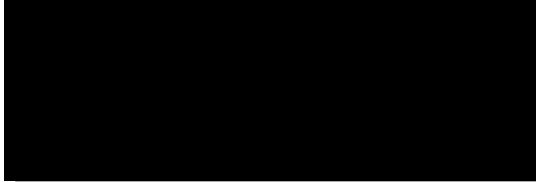
In terms of how the Welsh Government holds health boards to account for delivery of timely ambulance patient handover, this is done through a range of mechanisms:

- I hold health board chairs to account for delivery and have incorporated ambulance patient handover improvement as a key objective for all chairs for 2023/2024. I consistently seek assurance from chairs as a collective on their organisations' commitment to making improvements through regular national meetings.
- There are established national mechanisms for monitoring the quality, safety and effectiveness of services provided by health boards across Wales. Assurance is sought and challenge provided on a regular basis regarding ambulance patient handover performance, through 'integrated quality, planning and delivery (IQPD)' meetings between Welsh Government, the NHS Executive and NHS organisations.

These are held monthly in addition to 'Joint Executive Team (JET)' meetings held every six months.

- Information from a range of processes and partner organisations about ambulance patient handover performance and related issues, including reviews conducted by the NHS Executive and others, have and continue to feed into these assurance mechanisms.

Yours sincerely,



Eluned Morgan AS/MS

Y Gweinidog Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol
Minister for Health and Social Services