

Cyfarwyddwr Cyffredinol Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol/
Prif Weithredwr GIG Cymru
Grŵp Iechyd a Gwasanaethau Cymdeithasol

Director General Health and Social Services/
NHS Wales Chief Executive
Health and Social Services Group



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Mr Aled Gruffydd, Assistant Coroner
Swansea Neath & Port Talbot
Civic Centre
Oystermouth Road
Swansea
SA1 3SN
[REDACTED]

Our Ref: [REDACTED]

Your Ref: C [REDACTED]

13 December 2024

Dear Mr Gruffydd

INQUEST INTO THE DEATH OF PETER PARKER

Thank you for your correspondence dated 22 October received in my office on 7th November, in which you enclose a copy of a Regulation 28 Prevention of Future Deaths report ('the report') following the conclusion of the inquest into the death of Peter Parker. I should like to offer my sincere condolences to Mr Parker's family on their sad loss.

In the report you ask for details of action taken or proposed by the Welsh Government to improve timeliness of ambulance response to aid prevention of future deaths.

I note you have also written to the Chief Executive of Swansea Bay University Health Board (which is responsible for planning and delivering services based on an assessment of local population need), and the Chief Executive of the Welsh Ambulance Services University NHS Trust (which is responsible for delivering emergency ambulance services in line with commissioning intentions set of it by the NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee). The independent responses of the health board and the trust should detail the respective actions taken by each organisation to address your concerns.

A summary of urgent and emergency care system pressures

You are likely to be aware that urgent and emergency care services in Wales, as with other parts of the United Kingdom, have been under often unrelenting pressure for a number of

years. In summary, this is as a consequence of challenges presented by changing demographics, increasing prevalence of people with multiple chronic conditions and difficulties in supporting the timely discharge of patients to local communities caused by a range of factors. These factors include high hospital bed occupancy, delayed discharges caused by inefficient hospital processes and staffing shortages in key parts of the health and social care system.

Delayed patient discharge is a key contributing factor to long ambulance patient handover delays. This is because poor patient flow causes bed occupancy levels to increase, resulting in patients waiting lengthy periods for admission to hospital from emergency departments which, consequently, limits available space for patients arriving by ambulance to be transferred to the emergency department itself.

This can result in long ambulance patient handover delays, impacting negatively on patient experience and crucially limiting available ambulance capacity to respond to other patients in the community.

Expectations and monitoring of urgent and emergency care improvements

These issues are all connected and require whole system strategic change and leadership to overcome them. The overarching Welsh Government strategy towards improvement is set out in [A Healthier Wales](#). Aligned to this strategy, to enable better outcomes and experience for people who need to access urgent or emergency care services, the Welsh Government published the [Six Goals for Urgent and Emergency Care Policy Handbook](#) in February 2022.

This handbook describes our expectations for health boards and partners to support people in their local communities who are at greater risk of needing an ambulance response, transport to an emergency department and admission to hospital, and coordinating their care through clear care plans and support from local community teams.

The handbook sets out the intention to safely manage people who do not need to access the services of an acute hospital in their local communities, thus freeing up ambulance response and emergency department capacity for those who have an absolute clinical need for them.

The Welsh Government communicates its expectations of health boards and NHS Trusts through an annual NHS planning framework and organisations are expected to produce integrated medium-term plans annually that respond to the priorities set in the NHS planning framework.

For the past two iterations of the framework, the Welsh Government has been explicitly clear of our expectation that health boards prioritise plans to improve timeliness of ambulance patient handover to free up ambulance clinicians to respond to patients in the community. Given the relationship between both timely patient discharge and ambulance patient handover, the Welsh Government has set a priority for improvement in patient flow and the reduction of delayed discharges (pathways of care delays). To build on this, the Welsh Government has also set health boards in-year aspirations in 2024/2025 to reduce ambulance patient handovers over 1 hour by 30% by December 2024.

The Welsh Government has put in place additional performance oversight arrangements to enhance scrutiny of health boards' delivery against these and other key ministerial targets

through the new performance board arrangements. I am now holding monthly performance board meetings with health board chief executives.

Support via the national Six Goals for Urgent and Emergency Care programme

To enable health boards to deliver on our expectations, the Welsh Government established a national six goals for urgent and emergency care programme which is supported by £27million in funding for 2024/25. The Welsh Government also directed health boards to establish local six goals programmes to drive improvement of urgent and emergency care services and each health board has a local programme plan intended to deliver against ministerial priorities.

Successful delivery of these plans should support improvements across a range of measures, including the reduction of ambulance patient handover delays contributing to improved ambulance responsiveness. Progress in delivering these priorities is monitored through bi-monthly Integrated Quality, Planning and Delivery meetings between Welsh Government officials, representatives of the NHS Executive and health boards.

This six goals funding is part of a wider package of more than £180million in additional Welsh Government funding this year to support health boards and regional partnership boards to:

- safely manage more people in the community;
- avoid ambulance transport and admission to hospital; and
- deliver integrated solutions with social care services to improve patient flow through hospitals.

Other initiatives to support improvements in ambulance patient handover and patient flow

More recently, the Welsh Government has developed new ambulance patient handover guidance – published on 29 October 2024 which sets out expectations of the NHS Wales Joint Commissioning Committee, ambulance clinicians and health boards to support improved ambulance patient handover. The NHS Executive will undertake audits of organisations' compliance with the guidance over the remainder of 2024/2025, and we have been clear that health boards must also undertake their own audits of compliance.

Additionally, the Welsh Government commissioned the development of a community based falls response framework which was published by the NHS Executive on 30 October 2024 and a national task group established to enable health boards to deliver. The intention is to better support people who have fallen but are not seriously ill or injured, to safely avoid the need for an ambulance response or transport to emergency departments, thus reducing ambulance patient handover delays and improving experience and outcomes.

The Welsh Government has also recently launched a 50-day integrated care winter challenge ('the challenge') based on learning from other parts of the UK. The Welsh Government identified ten high-impact and best practice actions for health boards, regional partnership boards and local authorities to deliver between 11 November and 31 December 2024..

The challenge is intended to accelerate and standardise delivery of safe alternatives to admission to hospital and support timely discharge home and is enabled by an additional

£19m announced by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care on 3 December 2024.

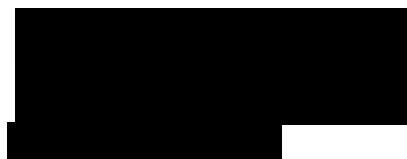
The Welsh Government are monitoring progress very closely and will review lessons learned following completion of the initial 50 days on 31 December 2024 to support sustained implementation of the best practice actions in 2025 and onwards. The Welsh Government also continues to engage regularly with other UK nations to learn lessons about solutions to the ambulance patient handover issue and will be seeking to transfer learning to improve performance in Wales in 2025.

Wider NHS escalation and intervention arrangements

Finally, although some progress has been made by the Swansea Bay University Health Board in some areas, concerns about delivery of urgent and emergency care and other areas led to the Welsh Government escalating the organisation to level 4 (targeted intervention) status in January 2024 for performance and outcomes. This means that the Welsh Government are now scrutinising the health board's performance extremely closely. In response, the health board is prioritising a range of actions to support better patient outcomes and experiences in the months ahead. The health board remains at level 4 as the necessary improvements have not yet been seen.

As part of this escalation, additional support has been given to the health board from the NHS Executive to support improvements in urgent and emergency care. These actions are being monitored and reviewed in monthly oversight meetings.

Yours sincerely

A large black rectangular redaction box covering the signature and name of the official.