

Accessible Information Policies and Communication Methods of NHS Organisations in Wales

NHS Trust and Local Health Board Responses

August 2008



Introduction

All NHS Trusts and Local Health Boards in Wales were contacted to provide their current position in relation to the following four questions:

1. Does the organisation have an accessible information policy or equivalent?
2. Do GP's routinely ensure information regarding patients sensory impairments and communication requirements are passed to the hospital?
3. Who would identify this information at the hospital to ensure effective communication mechanisms are used and in place for the future?
4. If NHS Trusts are made aware that a patient is deafblind, how do they communicate with the patient

Findings

The following report highlights the responses received, and have been grouped as close as practicable to, NHS Trusts and LHBs in the area. This enables the Trusts response to be read with the Local Health Board responses in the area. In the appendices are examples of standardised referrals pro-forma used in North Wales NHS Trust, with staff guidelines, Producing Information for the Public – Staff Guidelines, and Guide to producing Information in Alternative formats from Anglesey LHB, the Policy for Consulting and Engaging with Seldom Heard Groups currently under review by Caerphilly Teaching LHB.

The majority of NHS organisations in Wales do not have an Accessible Information Policy, although Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust is currently drafting one to be available in September 2008. Most NHS organisations in Wales, have a number of patient and information policies and strategies which include areas of accessible information.

Differences were noted in whether GPs informed secondary care of sensory impairments and communication needs. It appears to be standardised practice in areas where referral pro-formas are routinely used.

Local Health Board areas who have supported the Equip training for primary care professional in their area were also more confident that patients needs would be communicated in referral letters.

A variety of formats and methods to support patients communication needs are evidenced in this report. Again it varies across Wales.

NHS Organisations in Wales

NHS Organisation	1. Does the organisation have an accessible information policy or equivalent?	2. Do GP's routinely ensure information regarding patients sensory impairments and communication requirements are passed to the hospital?	3. Who would identify this information at the hospital to ensure effective communication mechanisms are used and in place for the future?	4. If NHS Trusts are made aware that a patient is deafblind, how do they communicate with the patient?
Gwent Healthcare NHS Trust	Our Accessible Information Guidelines are currently in draft and should be available in September 08	GP's are generally good in letting us know by letter when a patient they are referring to us for an appointment requires a different format for their letter or an interpreter	The Trust has a centralised booking system and the booking clerk will pick up any access issues, including communication and refer on to the Patient Liaison Officer, who then makes all the necessary arrangements.	See answer to question 3
Blaenau Gwent LHB	Blaenau Gwent does not have a specific Accessible Information Policy. However, it does have a range of policies and procedures, e.g. PPI and External Communications Policies, which ensure that	-	N/A	N/A

	information about the LHB, its roles and responsibilities and the services that it provides and commissions are accessible to local people.			
Caerphilly LHB	Our Public and Patient Involvement strategy has been revised and emphasises our commitment to provide high quality accessible information for all groups. Our Publications Protocol gives guidance for staff on providing information in different formats. Advice is also included in our Seldom Heard Groups Policy. We are working closely with the Disability Forum set up jointly with the Local Authority to raise awareness of difficulties that may be experienced with accessing local services. We have also established a Deaf Forum with the local deaf community who are able to advise us on more effective ways to provide accessible services for deaf and blind people. All information provided by the LHB can be provided in accessible formats on request.	GPs treat patients holistically and therefore will pass on information regarding patients with sensory impairments as part of the referral process between primary and secondary care. The LHB also directly employs salaried GPs who, as well as undertaking this, will also follow the LHB's policies on Communication and Equality and Diversity.	N/A	N/A

NHS Organisation	1. Does the organisation have an accessible information policy or equivalent?	2. Do GP's routinely ensure information regarding patients sensory impairments and communication requirements are passed to the hospital?	3. Who would identify this information at the hospital to ensure effective communication mechanisms are used and in place for the future?	4. If NHS Trusts are made aware that a patient is deafblind, how do they communicate with the patient?
Monmouthshire LHB	We do not have an accessible information policy, however publications that we issue and our general information (eg on website or other correspondence) makes clear that we aim for information to be accessible to all. We therefore make information available in formats required (eg large print, on tape or in braille).	Our GP practices advise that they stipulate any disabilities in their referral letters	N/A	N/A
Newport LHB	There are two relevant policies in place, the interpretation and translation policy, this policy sets out the correct procedure to be followed by all staff and enables staff to access appropriate communication services including BSL and deaf blind interpretation.	This information is sometimes passed on, there does not appear to be standardised practice.	N/A	N/A

NHS Organisation	1. Does the organisation have an accessible information policy or equivalent?	2. Do GP's routinely ensure information regarding patients sensory impairments and communication requirements are passed to the hospital?	3. Who would identify this information at the hospital to ensure effective communication mechanisms are used and in place for the future?	4. If NHS Trusts are made aware that a patient is deafblind, how do they communicate with the patient?
Torfaen LHB	<p>We don't have an Information Policy as such, but the following would probably be relevant and are on our website:-</p> <p>Data Security Policy IT Security Policy Gwent Information Sharing Protocol Records Management Strategy Communications Strategy</p>	Yes, always noted at the beginning of a referral letter.	N/A	N/A
Cardiff & Vale NHS Trust	We incorporate access policies in a general manner within our Single Equality Scheme and Action Plans so that access becomes a mainstream issue.	There are not many GP's in our experience that make us aware of such issues.	The onus is on the GP's to highlight the information so that it is brought to our attention. If it is highlighted then we respond appropriately e.g. we have a telephone helpline and permit patients	When we are made aware of such issues by GP's then we respond appropriately e.g. information is sent out on large fonts. We do this very specifically for appointments made by our ophthalmology service.

			to attend with whom ever they wish to bring along for support.	
Velindre NHS Trust	With regard an accessible information's policy - the Trust as a whole has a Communication policy and strategy, A communications toolkit is currently out to consultation. This will look in more depth at modes of accessible communication.	Screening services and VCC in particular are reliant on information about accessibility etc to be provided by GP's currently on the whole this is not	With respect to screening, letters are sent out to population groups (women within age groups) and the system is reliant on a support service or family member on the other side to explain the nature of the service and contact screening to arrange alternate format.	Screening - Information leaflets are currently available in a variety of formats including Braille. National Public Health Service - work with local health teams and have a variety of information which can be requested in different formats Welsh Blood Service - due to problems around communication, the current Blood Safety law and rules would not allow a Deaf blind donor to give blood.
Cardiff LHB	We have a communications Strategy and Policy which includes accessible information. All information provided by the LHB can be provided in accessible formats on request.	As part of the Annual Practice visits, practices are encouraged to adhere to all equality legislation, guidance and best practice where appropriate. We also have a Deaf Advisor who acts as an advocate for	N/A	N/A

		patients in Cardiff practices and Cardiff & Vale NHS Trust		
North Wales (Central) NHS Trust	<p>There are two relevant policies in place:</p> <p>i) the interpretation and translations policy; this policy sets out the correct procedure to be followed by all staff and enables staff to access appropriate communication services including BSL and deaf blind interpretation.</p> <p>ii) The policy for the production of information for patients/users/carers and visitors; this policy states that <i>The Trust is committed to serving the needs of our diverse community and has a responsibility to ensure that everyone can access all services including patient information.</i></p>	This information is sometimes passed on, there does not appear to be standardised practise	Clinic Clerks may identify a specific requirement identified by the GP in the referral letter. This would be highlighted by the Consultant during triage of referrals	<p>Large print appointment cards are sent our routinely to users attending the Low Vision Clinic.</p> <p>If a specific need was highlighted or a request made for a specific format, this would be met. Information for staff on how to access Braille translation and arrangements to fund are set out in the above policies.</p> <p>The Ophthalmology Department work closely with the Vision Support Team (located on the same site). This team are an independent charity funded by social services and act as advisors in respect of visual impairment.</p> <p>The Ophthalmology Team do not recall requests for appointment</p>

	<i>Authors must give due regard to all strands of equality including race, culture and language, religion and belief, disability, age, sexuality and gender.</i>			letters in Braille but arrangements are in place should this be necessary. Carers maybe identified as contacts.
North West Wales NHS Trust	Guidelines for Producing Patient Information	Not always. There have been occasions when patients turn up for appointments and the Trust has not been notified, however, every effort is made to accommodate their needs	If information is supplied at point of referral or appointment then it would be the duty of the referral clerk who acts on the information	On a case by case basis
Flintshire LHB	Flintshire LHB has developed two guidelines/toolkits to support the production of accessible information. These are a guide to Producing Accessible Information for the Public and Flintshire LHB.	We have run EQIP training for General Practices and encourage them too identify special needs when referring	N/A	N/A
Gwynedd LHB	Gwynedd LHB has a <i>Procedure for Producing Public Information</i> and a Communication Policy which address these issues.	If a GP is aware of a specific communication need related to a patient's disability, this will usually be disclosed in the referral letter.	N/A	N/A

NHS Organisation	1. Does the organisation have an accessible information policy or equivalent?	2. Do GP's routinely ensure information regarding patients sensory impairments and communication requirements are passed to the hospital?	3. Who would identify this information at the hospital to ensure effective communication mechanisms are used and in place for the future?	4. If NHS Trusts are made aware that a patient is deafblind, how do they communicate with the patient?
Conwy and Denbighshire LHB/ Health Community	We do not have an accessible information policy but we do have a Communication Strategy which contains information on how to produce information for the public. This is available on our website at www.conwylhb.wales.nhs.uk . We also have a PPI Strategy and Clinical Governance Strategy, which contains information on dealing with the public.	a) As part of the referral process, the majority of GP practices do include information of any special needs of the patient. b) The Conwy and Denbighshire Health Community have developed a generic referral Proforma (attached) which has been piloted across the health community on all GP systems. The Proforma has been designed to incorporate best practice and recommended SIGN guidance on what constitutes a good quality referral, most of the information required for completion on the Proforma is populated from the patient's record	N/A	N/A

		<p>through setting up merge field. The Proforma includes a section for inputting <i>Patient's issues, special needs, disabilities, language, social circumstances</i> of the patient, which will prompt practices to include such information. There is also a frequently asked question and answer sheet that has been developed in line with the generic referral template to give more detail on what information should be included on the template, section Q8 gives examples of what information should be included under the <i>Patient's issues etc.</i> which include examples of patients that are blind and deaf. The generic referral process is being launched this month for all practises and will be installed on all GP systems in Conwy, Denbighshire and Flintshire, and will be used for referring into the North</p>		
--	--	---	--	--

		Wales NHS Trust. A similar referral template has also been developed and is already used for referring to North West Wales NHS trust		
Anglesey LHB	We have a guidance document – Producing Information for the public which refers specifically to procedures re accessible information.	Not Known	N/A	N/A
Wrexham LHB	Wrexham LHB has Staff Guidelines on Producing Information for the Public as an appendix to its Communications Strategy.	This is usually part of the GPs referral letter.	N/A	N/A
Cwm Taf NHS Trust	<p>We don't have anything which is called/termed an accessible information policy but will have the same documents as described by Torfaen in the thread of this e-mail.</p> <p>Will be pleased to see such a policy if anyone has one. Additionally, the data which will arise from the Patient Equality Monitoring Project in the future will be invaluable in helping us to be more responsive to individual patients.</p>	Issues would normally be highlighted within the referral letter	Patients attending for an ophthalmology appt will automatically receive info in larger font.	Patients attending for an ophthalmology appt will automatically receive info in larger font.
Powys LHB	PLHB have information	A letter was sent to all GP	Information can be	Braille and large Font

	<p>available via various formats, large print, audio, Braille, internet website, CD Rom etc. This is also publicised in the Annual Report advising of alternative methods of Communication. Information is also accessible at local level at the hospitals where staff will enquire about appropriate methods of communication directly with patients. The Disability Equality Scheme also makes reference to the various methods of communication available.</p>	<p>Requesting that this information was entered on Referrals letter when Partial Booking commenced in Oct 05.</p>	<p>entered in keynotes on Patient Information System to staff are aware of patients needs.</p>	<p>along with other methods of communication are available for patients</p>
<p>Vale of Glamorgan LHB</p>	<p>We don't have a specific 'accessible information' policy, but we do have a range of equality schemes (downloadable from our website) that set out how we make our information available, in what formats etc, and how we are able to respond to specific requests.</p> <p>Our website is required to be 'bobby rated' and our web info is to a set standard that ensures it is easily readable and that text can be enlarged as required. We also operate 'browsealoud'. We have a deaf</p>		<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>

	<p>services advisor who operates a minicom service, and we have access to BSL interpreters also to help us respond to requests.</p>			
<p>Mertyhr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taff LHBs</p>	<p>With regards to an accessible information policy - both Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taff tLHB have a Communication Policy and Strategy, IMT Policy and a Records Management Strategy and are in the process of developing a linguistic policy. Both LHB's have a policy in place that require all public documents published to have a statement advising that the information is available in other language and formats i.e. Braille upon request. Action plans are in place to support all equality schemes which support this principle and both LHB's were very proactive in engaging with the public at work shops and presentation at a number of events to encourage services users to participate in the development of our schemes.</p>	<p>There is no structured mechanism in place to ensure that the information is passed to the hospital however, generally General Practitioners do make it aware within referral letters if a patient has a special need or has any sight or hearing impairment</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>N/A</p>

	The four LHB's in the former Bro Taf area which include Merthyr Tydfil and Rhondda Cynon Taff fund a Deaf Advisor, which provides support to Primary and Secondary Care patients during consultations.			
Hywel Dda NHS Trust	Each predecessor organisation of the Hywel Dda NHS Trust has a Public and Patient Information Policy	GPs do not routinely ensure this information is passed to hospitals to support effective communication	We are not informed if a patient is deafblind, therefore all communication goes out as normal and we are unable to make the adjustments as we are unaware of the requirements	However, when deaf patients attend clinic for the first time, we note on the electronic patient record that they will require interpreter/sign language and the nursing staff are made aware the patient will be attending in advance of the clinic date so these facilities can be booked. In out-patients, we try and offer the best facilities possible with large print, loop systems, interpreters, but our ability to do this relies on information being communicated to the Trust.
Carmarthenshire LHB		We do have a 'special needs' field on our	N/A	N/A

		standard referral letters. This where we would anticipate GPs would advise the Trust of any particular communication needs of the patient.		
Ceredigion & Pembrokeshire LHBs	The LHBs have internal guidelines for accessible information.			There is nothing in the QoF targets/process regarding this.
Abertawe Bro Morgannwg University NHS Trust	<p>The former Trusts (Swansea NHS Trust and Bro Morgannwg NHS Trust) published the following documents and guidance to ensure that all information is accessible to patients.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy for the Production of Information for Patients • Guidance for Producing Patient Friendly Information • Communication Policy and Strategy 	All GPs have been requested to provide details where patients have particular communication needs to enable appropriate arrangements to be made when they are attending a planned appointment. This would appear to be happening in practice.	Where the Patient Services Department is made aware of a patient's information needs, clerical staff would make arrangements to ensure that the appointment is sent out in the appropriate format.	<p>If the Patient Services Department is advised of a patient with either/both hearing or visual impairments, arrangements would be made to ensure that all details of the appointment are made accessible, according to the patient's individual needs.</p> <p>New arrangements have been put into place to ensure that patients are aware that information '...can be made available in alternative formats and other languages, on request, as is reasonably</p>

	The new Trust is in the process of reviewing these documents and guidance.			<p>practicable to do so.' This has been achieved by stating this on patient information documentation.</p> <p>Customer Care Training and Equality and Diversity Training covers the need to provide patient information, in accordance with an individual's needs.</p>
Swansea LHB	No response	A great deal of training has been provided to make primary care staff aware of the needs of people with sensory impairments, and the LHB funds the BSL interpreters on request. GPs are encouraged to ensure that details of any disabilities are included on referral to secondary care to ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place for appointments	N/A	N/A
Neath Port Talbot LHB	We do not have an accessible information policy. However, we have a corporate communications policy.	We have not done an audit of GP Practices to ascertain whether or not this information is routinely passed on to hospitals.	N/A	N/A

		However, we believe that most GPs pass on information about DeafBlind patients because their disability would require specific communication support.		
Welsh Ambulance NHS Trust	Compliance with corporate policies - all published material will adhere to the corporate style, the bilingual and equal opportunities policies. The Trust strives to communicate to all sections of the community. To this end, all the Trust's external publications will be bilingual and carry a statement saying that the document is available on request in Braille, large print or on audio tape free of charge, with clear information on how to make this request. The exception to this will be news releases which for the speed of distribution will be issued in English only in the first instance and made available bilingually on the website. Text on print documents available to the public will be set in a minimum of 12 point. All communications from the Trust	N/A	N/A	N/A

	will adhere to the bilingual policy.			
--	--------------------------------------	--	--	--