

# Health, Wellbeing and Local Government Committee

HWLG(3)-19-09 : Paper 17

## Committee Inquiry into Stroke services in Wales – Written evidence from Mrs Andrea Grace

Dear Sir/Madam,

### RE: Health and Wellbeing Committee – Stroke Services

I would like to contribute to the above enquiry regarding Stroke Services in Wales.

I have enclosed a copy of a letter sent to Edwina Hart AM on 20/2/09 and a copy of the reply received from Dr. Tony Jewell, dated 6/3/09. The experience my father has had since suffering a stroke on New Years Eve 2007 has been unimaginable. As follows:

No brain scan for 3 days;

Lack of correct medication until scan undertaken;

Lack of specialist stroke nurses;

Lack of proper equipment – stroke chairs;

Lack of counselling/specialist stroke support;

Lack of support on discharge from hospital;

Lack of physiotherapy at home – not had 1 day of community physio/re-ablement; (Resorted to paying for private physio which could not be sustained due to financial cost)

Lack of support for disability adaption's at home. (Bathing equipment, hand rails on stairs etc)

This list is just an example of the type of support my father needs but hasn't received.

I would be willing to give oral evidence if required.

Regards,

Andrea Grace (Mrs)

### Annex 1

Dear Mrs Hart,

RE: Stroke Care in Wales

I plead with you to read my letter with your full attention, as I write to you in relation to this weeks Week In Week Out programme on BBC Wales regarding the care of Stroke Victims in Wales which can only be described as 'Shambolic'.

The fact that you didn't even appear on the programme spoke volumes, you are the Health Minister for Wales, and so even if you had other commitments, you could have at least provided a statement. No, instead, you placed the Senior Medical Officer who couldn't answer most of the questions and when she did, were just woolly answers. It stood for very uncomfortable viewing, the silences and the facial cringes. It was pitiful.

But not half as pitiful as the way in which stroke sufferers in Wales are treated. Dr Tony Rudd stated the service here in Wales was like a third world nation, let me tell you, when you have someone you love suffer a stroke, it is terrifying. That person is taken away from you. My father had a massive stroke on New Years Eve 2007, 4 months after his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. On admission to hospital (Neath Port Talbot) the catalogue of errors commenced: Brain scan after 3 days, no communication to the family, lack of physiotherapy, lack of correct stroke chairs, lack of specialist stroke nurses, the list is endless. But it doesn't end there, on discharge from hospital the nightmare continued. He is sent home with an A4 piece of paper for physiotherapy exercises!!!! He hasn't had one day of physio at home and not one person has been to assess his progress. Can you imagine what that feels like? He was a lively person with a good social life, drove a sports car, enjoyed foreign travel, had fun with his young grandchildren. Overnight his life was taken away from him. His stroke has a scale of 8 out of 10 and left him severely disabled (left side paralysis). Can you imagine the psychological effect this has had on him and the rest of the family. Our lives have changed beyond belief. And yet, there is no support for people like us, no-one showing an interest, no-one showing you support and no-one offering counselling. You are left to your own devices and my mother from day 1 has become his carer 24/7 and also expected to be his physiotherapist! It is SHAMEFUL and I hold you personally responsible for this, Edwina Hart, for not taking enough of a lead. You've had years to implement a better service, so much for devolution; you have failed the people of Wales, if Scotland and England have met their targets in Stroke Services then why haven't you?? Where exactly is this £2.5 million being

spent????

Dr Tony Rudd said it was time the Welsh Assembly woke up and took this issue seriously; stroke is a medical emergency, not just in the immediate aftermath. It requires proper care and medical attention in hospital and also when patients are sent home. Stroke can have worse effects than Heart Disease or Cancer and yet it has the least attention.

Yes, there have been some recent adverts on television to raise awareness but it is too late for people like my father. What are you going to do for the thousands of stroke sufferers that have not had the benefit of a correct stroke service – those that have suffered significant disability because the Welsh Assembly have dragged their feet at the issue?? Prompt medication can never guarantee a full recovery but everyone deserves a CHANCE.

I am very angry and bitter over the way my parents have been treated. They have felt very alone, isolated and let down by you. Two hard-working individuals who worked since leaving school up to their retirement and never used the benefit system and yet when they needed help they didn't get it.

We have tried to go down many avenues to get answers such as Neath Port Talbot Council Social Services, the complaints sector at NPTCBC, our local AM Gwenda Thomas, our local MP Peter Hain, each time hitting a brick wall, no answers, no results.

So, you see, over the last 14 months we have come to accept that this is the way it is. Where else would we turn? All we wanted was for someone from the medical profession to show an interest in him, provide community physiotherapy/rehabilitation (He ended up paying for expensive private physiotherapy) and monitor his progress. This is NON-EXSISTENT.

So when this programme was aired this week, it brought all the issues and emotions to the surface again. My mother and I cried from the start of the programme to the end because we realised there are other stroke victims and their families suffering like us. A stroke can make you angry and bitter and these emotions are made worse when you are neglected by the authorities. It saddens me to think that my father could have had a better recovery had he not lived in Wales.

Please do not respond to my letter with figures, expenditure targets etc. I'm not interested. We want honest answers which actually provide real, tangible results.

I thank God that there are people like Dr. Rudd who can speak out against the Governments like yours. He stated it as it was "Scandalously bad". This was comforting and inspiring knowing there is someone out there who is actually acknowledging how bad it is. He was a voice for us and a revelation long overdue.

Lets hope that stroke victims and their families, along with the Stroke Association can muster up enough support to commence lobbying the WAG so that we can see real improvements in stroke services in Wales, both in hospitals and after-care community rehabilitation. But isn't it a shame that it has to come to this!!

You and the Welsh Assembly have let this country down!

Andrea Grace (Mrs)

## **Annex 2**

Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government

### **Dr Tony Jewell**

Chief Medical Officer  
Prif Swyddog Meddygol  
Director, Department for Public Health and Health Professions  
Cyfarwyddwr, Ad ran Iechyd y Cyhoedd a'r Proffesiynau Iechyd

Em cyf/AT/OIOI 1/09

Mrs Andrea Grace  
Grig -Y. Tewgoed  
Vale View  
Po ntneddfech a  
Glynneath  
SAI 1 5UN

6<sup>th</sup> March 2009

Dear Mrs Grace,

Thank you for your letter of 20 February about stroke services in Wales, addressed to the Minister for Health and Social Services. I have been asked to reply.

I appreciate the concerns of the public over the provision of stroke care in Wales, a matter highlighted by recent publicity. However, I want to reassure you that there is progress in the improvement of our services although it will take time to bring them to a standard

with which we are all satisfied. In keeping with any service, it is not possible to achieve a total change immediately but it is essential to ensure that appropriate progress is made towards the agreed aim.

The Minister for Health and Social Services recognise that stroke "services "in Wales as is the case in England and the rest of the UK, are not as good as they should be and that the NHS must review the way it is using its significant resources. To achieve the necessary improvements requires a range of strategies; some relate to changes in current clinical practice whilst others require investment in staff and facilities.

The Minister has taken action to improve the situation and has designated improving stroke services as a top priority. The Assembly Government has published a programme of work for the NHS to direct and guide the necessary improvements. The Minister has established the All Wales Stroke Partnership, comprising a number of key all Wales NHS organisations working alongside the Stroke Association, to lead and support the NHS in making the necessary improvements.

Formal action plans have been put in place to map the activity and milestones to achieve full compliance with national standards and guidelines on the provision of high quality stroke care. A formal target for the NHS has been set for the end of March which requires that each person who has had, or is suspected of having, a stroke is assessed and treated by a specialist stroke team in co-located and dedicated stroke beds, in line with national guidelines. This target must be achieved across Wales in every hospital that admits stroke patients. In order to support the work, the Minister has made an additional £2.5 million per annum available from 2008-09 to help achieve improved acute stroke care. This funding will allow a number of changes to be implemented immediately.

Improvements to longer term rehabilitation, which is an extremely important and integral part of stroke care, will take longer. The Minister expects the Stroke Partnership to support the NHS by developing protocols that set out clearly what services someone who has had a stroke can expect to be offered on leaving hospital to help them return to independent living. The importance of ensuring a total care package is exemplified by stroke being in the first cohort of 'Intelligent targets' being developed with the service. These targets are based on assessment of the complete patient care pathway and so ensure that appropriate care is delivered by appropriate staff in a timely manner. By shifting the emphasis in target setting from 'quantity' to 'quality', we believe we are acknowledging what is most important to patients.

Aligned to the work outlined above, the recent independent review of Neuroscience Services in Wales has made a number of recommendations related to stroke care and these are being considered and actioned by the two Report Implementation Groups.

The Welsh Assembly Government recognises that awareness of the symptoms of stroke and what action to take, needs to be improved. The Stroke Partnership is working with the Department of Health to run a high profile publicity campaign to raise awareness of the Stroke Association's 'FAST' campaign and the need to seek urgent medical help if someone shows any symptoms of stroke.

I hope that you will agree that there is an enormous amount of work being undertaken to improve our stroke services. Services will not be transformed overnight. The Assembly Government will continue to closely monitor the improvements that have been agreed and the targets we have set. We will take action where these are not being met so as to ensure we achieve a safe, secure and sustainable stroke service for the future.

Yours sincerely

Dr Tony Jewell