



Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1197
Ein cyf/Our ref EM/12322/21

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

28 September 2021

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter dated 2 September about the Petition P-06-1197 regarding introducing a heart screening programme for all 11 to 35-year-olds in Wales who represent their school or county in sport.

Population screening programmes generally can save lives through early risk identification but can also do harm by identifying risk factors that would never otherwise develop into a serious condition or complication. Screening programmes may have false negative results, so do not guarantee protection. Additionally, receiving a low risk result does not prevent the person from developing the condition at a later date. Population screening programmes should only be offered where there is robust, high-quality evidence that screening will do more good than harm.

The UK National Screening Committee (UK NSC) advises Ministers in the four UK countries about all aspects of population screening. It brings academic rigour and authority to what is an extremely complex area and is a world leader in its field. Unselected whole-population screening to prevent sudden cardiac death (SCD) in 12 to 39-year-olds has been considered by the UK NSC and is not recommended.

The UK NSC concluded the harms of whole-population screening for SCD currently outweigh the benefits. There are uncertainties about the overall benefits of identifying people with risk factors, current tests are not reliable enough (many people would be missed and provided with false reassurance, and many would be given false positive results) and there is currently no agreed treatment for someone who has been identified at risk. If a person is incorrectly identified as being at risk, they may become anxious about their physical activity and stop exercising regularly or be excluded from participating in sports, which could have a negative effect on their overall health. It could also potentially affect their ability to get life insurance.

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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.

The evidence has been comprehensively reviewed and below is a link to the UK NSC review and recommendation: <https://view-health-screening-recommendations.service.gov.uk/sudden-cardiac-death/>

Given that the UK NSC does not recommend whole-population screening for SCD for 12 to 39-year-olds due to the inaccuracy of current testing, the Welsh Government cannot introduce screening for all those in this age group representing their school or county in sport. The UK NSC keeps all its policy positions under regular review and I would suggest that Calon Heart Screening Wales consider asking the UK NSC to review the evidence for introducing a targeted screening programme for SCD for those participating in sports: [Appendix D: How to submit a proposal to the UK NSC - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

I fully support the need to address the preventable causes of SCD; however, here too there is a balance to strike in the provision of health information to the public to ensure proportionality and accessibility in the messages being provided, without creating unnecessary anxiety. At a population level, it is beneficial for young people not to be discouraged from cardiovascular exercise – the benefits of which are well established.

Although whole-population screening is not beneficial, families of individuals with SCD should be offered individual clinical assessments to assess their risk. This is 'cascade' case-finding in a higher-risk population rather than whole-population asymptomatic screening. Additionally, young people who have symptoms or concerns, particularly if they are very physically active, should speak to their GP who will be able to advise them as appropriate.

Welsh Government has worked in partnership with the Wales Cardiac Network, Welsh Ambulance Services NHS Trust and the third sector to develop the Out of Hospital Cardiac Arrest Plan published in June 2017. The aim is to increase survival from out of hospital cardiac arrest through optimising the "chain of survival".

We established the Save a Life Cymru partnership in January 2019 to bring together all the different pieces of the jigsaw in relation to encouraging public participation in taking action when faced with an out of hospital cardiac arrest. I have reaffirmed the Welsh Government commitment and an additional £2.5 million for the Save a Life Cymru Partnership to improve awareness and access to CPR and defibrillation.

Yours sincerely,



Eluned Morgan AS/MS

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