



Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1220
Ein cyf/Our ref EM/13448/21

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee

16 November 2021

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 20 October to the Minister for Social Justice regarding a petition to increase funding available for Women's Health Services, Education and Awareness. I am responding as Minister with portfolio which includes Women's Health.

Welsh Government expects all health boards to provide a full range of services to women in accordance with National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidance. The NHS receives the majority of its funding from the Welsh Government to cover the running costs of health services in Wales. Health Boards and NHS Trusts are expected to develop robust plans to deliver against our priorities and have a duty under the Social Services and Well-being Act 2014 to conduct an assessment to ensure delivery of services and provision meet the needs of their populations which must include the needs of women and girls.

The improvement of health services for women has remained a priority for successive Governments in Wales. It is essential our health services offer advice and care to girls and women across the course of their lives and delivers a model of care that provides support to enable women to remain healthy throughout their lives.

The Maternity 5 year Vision for Wales was published in July 2019, stating that 'Pregnancy and childbirth are life changing events for a woman and her family, momentous and eagerly anticipated. Maternity staff have the opportunity to support a woman and her family through this transition ensuring safe, clinically effective care whilst providing a personalised and positive experience'.

Workstreams have been established within the maternity and neonatal network to ensure delivery of the vision which is family centred and addresses individual needs, specifically focusing on a named midwife planning care in coproduction with the pregnant person and her family. Education, support and referral to specialist services are at the core of service provision for the future.

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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.

In recent years, much of our response to addressing issues in women's health has been delivered through the work of the Women's Health Implementation Group (WHIG). The WHIG was established in March 2018 as a ministerially-directed group to consider a report into the use of synthetic tape and mesh sheets for stress urinary incontinence and pelvic organ prolapse. The Group's remit was subsequently expanded to also include consideration of two additional reports on endometriosis and fecal incontinence as it was clear synergies could be realised to address women's pelvic health more broadly.

Since its establishment, the WHIG has been allocated £1million per year from Welsh Government. This money has been used to fund the programme manager and to establish a network of pelvic health and well-being coordinators in each health board. More recently it has allowed for the recruitment of a network of specialist endometriosis nurses in each health board as well as a range of other activities.

Earlier this year, *Bloody Brilliant*, our online resource and educational platform was launched. We know that taboos and lack of education about menstruation have tangible negative effects on girls and women's lives. It can affect future sexual and reproductive health and the lack of knowledge about periods and what counts as 'normal' can lead to the late diagnosis of serious conditions such as endometriosis, polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD), or gynaecological cancers. *Bloody Brilliant* will help break period taboos and empower young women and girls to better understand their menstrual health and to know what is 'normal' and when they should seek help.

The menopause is part of the natural ageing process for women and usually occurs between the ages of 45 and 55. In the UK, the average age is 51, but it can happen much earlier. It is important to recognise that for many reasons; people's individual experiences of the menopause may differ greatly and therefore the clinical response will also vary from person to person.

The NICE guidelines include the requirement to adopt an individualised approach at all stages of diagnosis, investigation and management of menopause and the need to refer women to a healthcare professional with expertise in menopause if treatments do not improve their menopausal symptoms or they have ongoing troublesome side effects.

We have provided an additional £42 million this year for mental health support and our Programme for Government makes it clear that we will continue to prioritise investment in mental health services. Within our refreshed Together for Mental Health delivery plan 2019-2022, our key priority areas includes supporting perinatal mental health and improving access to psychological therapies, and these areas have been supported by increased investment in service improvement funding.

Since 2015, we have invested in specialist perinatal mental health services across Wales, there are now specialist teams in every Health Board area in Wales.

Over the last 12 months the all Wales Perinatal Mental Health Clinical lead and the Perinatal Mental Health Network have developed a pathway of care. The aim of the pathways are to standardise practice, to provide clarity around roles and responsibilities and reflect a preventative, earlier intervention and evidence based approach. As well as providing equity, these pathways should ensure that the right care is provided by the right people and at the right time.

The perinatal mental health clinical lead is working in partnership with the WHIG, which has commissioned a behavioural change organisation, Social Change UK, to develop resources for families and their supporters where physical and mental health and wellbeing will not be seen in isolation. The project will offer support via resources and a subsequent campaign

that gives individuals in Wales the ability to monitor and safeguard their own health and wellbeing during the perinatal period, through a life course approach, improving population health through a focus on prevention and avoiding harm wherever possible. The project is starting with listening to the views of the people of Wales, through the insights gathered evidenced based resources will be created and the campaign will give the people of Wales what they want in the method they would like to receive the information. It is planned to conduct focus groups and stakeholder engagement events early 2022. By working in partnership, WHIG and the Perinatal Mental Health Network can strengthen the impact and value across Wales and lead to greater outcomes for families and individuals throughout the perinatal period.

This work will also complement the Network's approach to further developing an online training offer, to ensure sustainability of training and to extend training to all health and social care staff working with families across Wales during the perinatal period.

Covid-19 has placed unprecedented challenges upon the NHS both in Wales and the UK more broadly. Like many services across our health system, gynaecology provision has faced substantial disruption and waiting times for many women needing access to care have significantly increased.

On 22 March, Welsh Government published a recovery plan for the NHS in Wales. The plan lays down the broad principles of recovery and the high level the approach we will take, building on new ways of working and opportunities to do things differently. Although gynecological services are not specifically referenced, there is an expectation that all health services will reflect the changes set out in the plan.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'M. E. Morgan'.

Eluned Morgan AS/MS

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