

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb i ymgynghoriad y [Pwyllgor Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol](#) ar [Effaith yr ôl-groniad o ran amseroedd aros ar bobl yng Nghymru sy'n aros am ddiagnosis neu driniaeth](#)

This response was submitted to the [Health and Social Care Committee](#) consultation on the [impact of the waiting times backlog on people in Wales who are waiting for diagnosis or treatment](#)

WT 15

Ymateb gan: | Response from: Coleg Nyrsio Brenhinol Cymru | Royal College of Nursing Wales





Royal College of Nursing Written evidence to the Health and Social Care Committee inquiry into the impact of the waiting times backlog

The Royal College of Nursing Wales (RCN Wales) welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence on the impact of the waiting times backlog to the Health and Social Care Committee. Helen Whyley, RCN Wales Director provided oral evidence on the 18.11.21. This written evidence will support and reiterate two key aspects from that evidence session; retention and post-registration commissioning.

The waiting lists for diagnostic, therapy appointments and surgical treatment have significantly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic as services had to be reorganised, paused and staff redeployed to meet the demands of the pandemic. The equivalent of around 1 in 5 of the Welsh population is now on an NHS waiting list and the backlog continues to increase.

Without a sufficient workforce, waiting lists will only increase. The workforce provide the care needed to address the backlog and support the patient whilst on the waiting list. Investing in modern technology will help to improve the backlog, but if there are no staff available to use the equipment the backlog will not reduce. The workforce ensures the patient receives care at an appropriate time, by the appropriate profession.

The Royal College of Nursing Wales strongly believe workforce planning is central to addressing waiting times. To ensure current waiting times are reduce the Welsh Government need to ensure staff want to keep working in NHS and social care. In addition, to address waiting lists in the future the Welsh Government must consider long term workforce planning, with a focus on increasing commissioning for post-registration nursing.

This evidence will focus on workforce planning in relation to addressing the waiting time backlog.

Retention.

Any plan to address the waiting time backlog needs to consider the workforce.

There are currently 1,719 registered nurse vacancies in the NHS. This is despite the Welsh Government increasing the number of nursing students in recent years. To keep nurses nursing the Welsh Government must address pay, access to continued professional development (CPD) and time-flexing in a national retention strategy.

A recent RCN survey (November 2021) found that 65% of Welsh respondents thought they were under too much pressure and 62% felt they were too busy to provide patients with the high quality care they want to. The workforce is under a considerable amount of pressure due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

The RCN survey (2021) also found that 41.4% of Welsh respondents were considering leaving their role; a further 17.1% were planning on leaving their role. This amounts to over nearly two thirds (59%) of respondents. When asked why they were considering/planning on leaving their role (tick all answers) 69% of Welsh respondents said they felt undervalued, 61% said staffing levels were too low, 59% said there was too much pressure and 58% said they felt exhausted. This is extremely concerning. Without a sufficient workforce, waiting times will only increase.

The Welsh Government need to show the nursing workforce that they are valued. It is vital that the Welsh Government develop a nursing retention strategy to address nursing concerns and keep nurses nursing. This must include better access to CPD in work hours, flexible working arrangements, and increasing pay.

Providing the right care at the right time by the right profession

To ensure the right nursing skills in the workforce which in turn means that people are seen and recover quicker Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) ensure there is a strategy for post-registration nursing commissioning. There needs to be more post-registration nurse specialists and district nurses.

To address the impact of the waiting time backlog there needs to be a recognition that investment is needed in multidisciplinary teams in community services. People need to be sure they are receiving the right help from the right professional at the right time.

Often when a patient is waiting for surgery or treatment, they are referred into the community to receive care. This often includes treatment for pain management, support by occupational therapists or physiotherapists, community pharmacists and support from district nursing teams. Once a patient has received their surgery they are often discharged to the community and receive care during their recovery.

District nurses are the pinnacle of expertise and knowledge in the community. They lead nursing teams, give advice and provide highly skilled care for people in the community including in care homes.

However, 10 years ago there were 749 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) District Nurses working in the community. Today, there are only 635 FTE. The number of FTE district nurses dropped by 41 between June 2020 and June 2021 alone - this means in one year, the district nursing workforce decreased by 6%.

There is currently no strategy for post-registration nursing commissioning and the number of district nursing courses and models commissioned by the Welsh Government have no increase in a number of years. As a result, the current commissioning figures for post-registration nursing education are not sufficient and will not facilitate the skills and knowledge needed to care for the patients awaiting treatment or surgery.

Mental health backlog

Mental health services, in particular specialised Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) are experiencing significant difficulties regarding waiting times.

In November 2020, during a difficult stage of the COVID-19 pandemic there were 943 people waiting for their first appointment to specialise CAMHS. This did reduce to 358 by May 2020, but unfortunately there was a further rise in cases in late 2020 into 2021.

The latest statistics regarding waiting time for specialised CAMHS are from October 2021. In October 2021, there were 754 individuals waiting for their first appointment, only 28% (210) were seen within the first four week period. Two third of all people waiting for treatment (454) come under Cardiff and the Vale Health Board. The health board only managed to see 13% of patients within the first four week period.¹

CAMHS is a highly specialised services and needs to have an appropriate number of staff with an appropriate skill mix in a safe environment. To achieve this there needs to be urgent investment in the workforce.

“I love my job and my patients, there is no option for a nurse not to put 100% in everyday to ensure safe patient care and every staff member in the NHS is still being pushed to do more, constantly forced into unsafe positions with inadequate support. A more appropriate pay would adequately reflect the skills and passion that people bring to this role, improve staffing levels and the morale of current staff.” (RCN Wales Member, Mental health nurse)

The Welsh Government needs to invest in pre-registration mental health nursing and ensure continued professional development opportunities are available for mental health and child nurses to specialise in child and adolescent services.

About the Royal College of Nursing (RCN)

The RCN is the world’s largest professional organisation and trade union of nurses, representing around 435,000 nurses, midwives, health visitors, healthcare support workers and nursing students, including over 27,000 members in Wales. RCN members work in both the independent sector and the NHS. Around two-thirds of our members are based in the community. The RCN is a UK-wide organisation, with its own National Boards for Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes excellence in nursing practice and shapes health and social care policy.

¹ <https://stats.wales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Health-and-Social-Care/Mental-Health/specialist-child-and-adolescent-mental-health-services-scamhs/first-appointment-waiting-times/scamhspatientpathwayswaitingforafirstappointment-by-month-groupedweeks>